Shreyarthee

(DEVOTEE OF THE DESIRABLE)

Dilip Borkar



Translated by:

Kiran Budkuley
'Rashmi Rathi'

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Biographical-Literary Commentary on Ravindra Kalekar

by ***Dilip Borkar***

Translated from the original Konkani

by ***Kiran Budkuley 'Rashmi Rathi'***

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Dedicated to Tobu
(Rajaram Girish Kelekar)
who had accompanied
us to Manipal...
but
has now embarked
on his eternal journey...!

The Translator's Micro-narrative

It is difficult to say why exactly I consented to undertake translating this book. Perhaps, I could not fight the combined effect of Dilip Borkar's affection for Ravindrabab and his suggestion of having a memento published for the English-reading public on the occasion of the Conferment of the prestigious Jnanpith Award-the first of its kind for Konkani-on Ravindrabab Kelekar. It is also likely, that I saw in this offer, a tiny reflection of my own sense of pride on Ravindrabab's string of achievements for Konkani, culminating in the Padma Bhushan Award and then the Gnyanpeeth.

But knowing Dilip and his manner of expression one would be unwittingly stepping into the mayasabha of reflection and inflection. This could be a heady mix of genuine commendation and latent controversy. But the joy of the former is certainly worth the risk of the latter.

I have succumbed to the temptation, striving to do the best in the circumstances, within a translator's ken. Without in any way consciously twisting the author's contention, I have tried to modulate its expression, and elevate some vagueness germane to intimate Konkani narrative by offering a phrase or two in the paranthesis for the benefit of the readers.

In endeavouring to be true to the author's expression and views, as a translator I distance myself from their implications and contentions, with the clear recognition of being unaware of either their veracity or intensity. However, as a translator, it has been my challenge and satisfaction to capture the authorial sense and sensibility as aptly as possible in the target narrative from the source narrative.

I expect the readership to look upon this rendering with affection and indulgence—both for the effort and its outcome. I thank Dilip Borkar heartily for this opportunity to indirectly contribute to the Ravindra Kelekar canon. I also appreciate the initiative of the 'BIMB' Publication and their associates in bringing out this book in record time.

—Kiran Budkuley 'Rashmi Rathi'

DEVOTEE OF THE DESIRABLE...

I have no inkling whatsoever of what is destined to be achieved at my hands, nor of how future is going to shape me. With a stranger's gaze, I can still see my childhood before my eyes and I am surprised to notice what I had been then and what I have become now! What must have shaped the Dilip of then and the present Dilip Borkar is something hard to imagine, much less to realize. It is at such moments that we tend to believe how all of us are like mere puppets on this earth. Wanting to achieve this and the other, we struggle all we can. Yet, all the time some One is trying to get something done from us. He goes on shaping us as He wants and gets the very work from us that He wills.

My family background was not particularly conducive to make me what I am today. My father was a hardworking *kulwadi* (peasant). My mother too was an ordinary woman striving hard with the sole intension of bringing up the children who had fallen to her lot in life. Her only ambition was that they should grow up as good kids without access to any wrong means and without interfering with anybody.

However, my unlettered parents had no idea of how to go about raising their children well. Nanda, my eldest brother was studying with the objective of surmounting the poverty and

dispelling the ignorance of the family, and hoped that his siblings would also be able to study.

But then, nursing hope is one thing and actually meeting the expenditure for education is quite a different cup of tea. Those who could not afford even the measly fee of Rs.2 per month to be paid to the school master, had no right to education.

Soon, Goa was liberated (from the Portuguese rule) and the problem of fee worth Rs.2 was finally solved. Education was now available in the village itself and the poorer children were also given 'free-ships'. Because of the value-laden atmosphere in the family, I could manage within the first three ranks until matriculation and thereby my family did not have to bear much of a burden for my education.

Boys from our kind of community study in a sort of environment where even their growing up has a certain limitation. Many of my companions from well-to-do households turned out to be medicos, lawyers and officers but they could not attain to a certain vision necessary to place the world in perspective. No doubt, by the social measure of success, they had arrived. But I am yet to see such an achiever (among them) whose name is well-known in public domain. I must admit, I have been fortunate to have such a recognition.

Considering the atmosphere and the situation from which I had emerged, this must appear to be the result of my efforts. However, it must also be admitted that a greater share of the credit for what I was to be, goes to that Ultimate Regulator of human fate.

What I should become and what should be achieved at my hands was something that 'He' must have already decided and so He went about bringing me in contact with the individuals necessary to attain this. Through such interactions, the foundation for my ideological and intellectual make was laid. In the

course of the last thirty years, I have indeed come across many great achievers. But whenever the occasion to decide on the course of my life or the need to reach such a decision arose, Ravindra Kelekar alone stood tall before my eyes. Yet, I cannot definitely say that Ravindrabab has (singularly) contributed to my intellectual make. I have been in love with reading ever since I learnt the alphabet. That love still endures. It is from reading that I have striven to find my intellectual moorings. Yet, there was still scope to give a desirable slant to my thinking. Ravindrabab has definitely contributed in this regard.

Every individual has his own 'field' of activity. Until one finds it, one fumbles and flounders in all directions. Once, he discovers the field of his own choice, he stays put contented. At such a juncture, he doesn't much care for gain and loss. In the course of imbibing 'this culture', if he is fortunate to find an appropriate 'field marshal' who can direct him suitably towards his desirable 'field', the march onwards can certainly become highly pleasant and rewarding.

I have been privileged to enjoy Ravindrabab's company for the last thirty years. Even before I knew it, the one who was formally introduced to me in 1976 as Ravindrabab, became an intimate 'Tato'.

Unlike the modern education system, in the past when there existed the Guru-shishya *parampara* (teacher-taught tradition), the disciple sat at the feet of the Guru and listened to him attentively. There he found all knowledge. He did not need to essay anything else.

Although I have not remained seated per se, at Ravindrabab's feet, the discussions I have had with him over the last 30 odd years, have opened up various realms of literature awakening in turn new vistas of knowledge and perception before me.

I thought of writing about this entire journey so well etched in my mind, and commit to paper how I feel about Ravindrabab. I have been toying with this thought ever since Ravindrabab completed 75 mellow years of age.

But as I tried to understand him and his thinking, and so ventured to study his writings, work, thought process and ideology, his worldview, I realized that here was a man whom my intelligence could not fully comprehend.

To add to my quandary, an article in lieu of a 'will' written by Ravindrabab was published in his weekly column *Swagat* (soliloquy) in 'Navprabha'. Therein, he had said in so many words, that without reading and carefully studying his published work in Konkani and Marathi, no one should venture to write on him. He had opined that one who writes on him should be able to identify the tendencies Ravindrabab had staunchly opposed in his role as 'fighter', and in the course of fighting them, for what reasons –and to what extent- he has changed.

This view expressed by him is correct. After all, the kind of work he has done has been out of the ordinary. None can write him off from the history of (modern) Goa. Those who wrote on the great souls, who have lived on this land, did so because they wanted to. Alternately, the government or some social institution 'got it written' because it was seen as an obligation to do so.

We have read such works. Often, those who have written such works have rendered themselves greater than those whom the works concern. Ravindrabab must have surely witnessed such things. Therefore, it is not wrong on his part to have expressed such an opinion. I agree with his views; moreover, I do not have the capability of writing on him in spite of having read all his work. That incidentally, is another matter for study; perhaps for research. It is not my field. Moreover, presently, I also have neither the time nor the objective to do so. If one has

to really understand Ravindrabab, then a proper work on him based on his entire oeuvre will take not less than a decade. It is not so easy, as he has rightly put it, to write on him –'it is not a task for any Tom, Dick and Harry'. The present adventure of writing this book is not in response to his expectation.

It is also not in the least a survey of his work. This book has gleaned merely the thoughts that arose in my mind. It is an endeavour, an experiment if one should so say, to express what I have sensed whenever I met him, every time I have read his books, tried going over his journalistic columns for references— all this just for my own pleasure. It is a work of joy; only for self-satisfaction.

Rabindranath Tagore writing to his niece, Indira Devi, expresses his regret, saying:

> *My contemporaries could not recognize me properly. They have insulted me in many ways. I jumped into the fray, thinking that I would serve the country. I did not care for health, wealth or household. After all, I had ventured into it after giving up home and hearth; often standing in front of the doors of the most unworthy, I have extended a hand. Leave aside the foes, I have had my share of the latent as well as open barbs even from friends. In this Bong land it is not so easy to insult others as it is to insult me. Those who have cursed me would never dare to curse others likewise. Cursing me has become a business for some. They know fully well that curse me as they will, it is never going to harm their interest; on the contrary, it is only going to benefit them.*

When I read this letter from Ravindranath Tagore's collection, our own Ravindrabab rose before my eyes. Whatever Ravindranath had endured and expressed regret about, was something I had witnessed in the case of this Ravindra too. The Marathi protagonists had cursed him. They were bound to do so. After all, they were his antagonists. But even the Konkani protagonists had scorned him. Articles implying 'Ravindrabab, You are Lost to Us' were published. This was the handiwork of hasty initiators who were reluctant to understand 'the idea'. Having witnessed all this, I felt that all my other writing would be worth naught, if I did not write anything on this man.

In spite of this, this work is not an attempt to raise an individual to the pedestal, nor to idolize him. Of all the 'characters' who came into my life, this one persona has been the most influential. Hence, this attempt to portray this character.

There is a Upanishad called *Kattha* or the *Kaatthak,* belonging to the '*Katthbranch'*. It has two *addhyaya*-s having three *valli*-s each. In the first *addhyaya*, there is the tale of Vaajshrawas and his disciple Nachiketa. Vaajshrawaswas was considered a pure, wealthy man, who is said to donate or gift away his entire wealth. He has been described as *ushan* in the *adhyaya.* However, it is also revealed, as to what exactly those whom society considers pure, respectable, devout (religious) and so on, are in reality! This (supposedly) generous, pure man donates useless cows whose life is effectively over. But his son Nachiketa does not agree with this. He cannot understand what (celestial) domain *(loka)* his father is likely to attain with such futile gifts. Hence, to caution his father he asks, "To whom are you going to gift me?"

When he repeats the query two or three times, the father is annoyed and says, " I shall gift you to Yama, God of Death". Nachiketa takes this statement seriously and goes to Yama's abode, but since he was not home, Nachiketa awaits

him, going without food for three nights. Realizing that making a visitor go hungry for three nights is a sin, Yama asks him to seek three boons from himself. In lieu of those three boons, Nachiketa wins the knowledge, hitherto not known to any mortal, of what Death means.

Seeing Nachiketa's staunch craving for knowledge, in the second *valli*, Yama explicates the philosophy of life to him. He says,

Anyat shreyonyadutaiwa preyyahaa
Te ubhe nanaarthe purusha sineetahaa/
Tayo shreyahaa aadadaanasya saadhubhawati
Heeyatertaarth u preyyo vraneete//1"

Shreyas means that which is desirable for one's own good; and *preyas* means that which one finds pleasing or likeable. *Shrey* and *Prey* are the two things which are in front of an individual, trying to entice him in different ways. At such junctures, a person should accept what is desirable for his good; but what is good may not be likeable. Yet, the man who adopts it for himself will find it to his ultimate good (welfare). *Prey* may be pleasing but it is momentary. It may seem good but it does not end in welfare.

Yamaraj tells Nachiketa: the one that wins you *Shri* is *shreyas,* it is different from the likeable thing. As such, matters pertaining to welfare and liking are both distinct. When both these draw an individual towards themselves, it causes a confusion as to which of the two should be accepted. Faced with this dilemma , it is best to accept the desirable that blesses us with the good, rather than the likeable that merely pleases us.

As I read this *valli* from *Katthopanishad*, my mind went out to Ravindrabab. This man kept the *preyas* at an arm's length all his life. When accosted with both *shreyas* and *preyas*, the thoughtful person carefully studies and scrutinizes both and then understanding the difference in both adopts the one which

is desirable, that is, one that will desirably benefit not merely himself, but the society at large.

A human being likes living in comfort; s/he finds it *preyas*. Something that can be gained without effort or strife, attracts us more than the other. Yet, although this appears to grant momentary pleasure, it ends up being the cause of (eternal) grief. But one who strives incessantly, without seeking rest or comfort, at something which though not likeable, is *shreyakar* (desirable, worth wishing for), by virtue of accepting it, ends up with happiness. Such a person alone becomes the *'shreyarthee'*.

Mahatma Gandhi for instance was intelligent, gifted. He practised law as a barrister. But giving up the likeable objective of earning wealth through the practice of law, he embraced the desirable goal of service to the country. As against this, there are any number of intelligentsia who think of making money by holding a government job. Shivaji Maharaj gave up the likeable prospect of a comfortable life in serving Adilshah for the more desirable task of winning freedom for his people. Although Bharat came to Chitrakoot in order to entreat Rama to return home to Ayodhya's throne, Rama preferred to uphold the *shreyas* and undergo fourteen years of stay in the forest, rather than chasing the *preyas* .

The reason for citing all this is to show that earning the spiritually desirable *(shreyas)* by giving up the earthly likeable (*preyas*), truly elucidates the meaning of life. Ravindrabab had the choice between the *shreyas* and the *preyas*; but he accepted the former. This was revealed to me through his words, actions and literary oeuvre. That is why, I consider him to be *shreyarthee* (the devoted of the desirable). Before, I had read Ravindrabab, I had read a lot others; but it had all been for entertainment—for pleasure. *That literature was preyas* to me. When I began reading Ravindrabab's work, I found it desirable although initially it felt a little heavy to absorb and digest.

In the course of this book, I do not intend to illustrate how and why Ravindrabab is a *shreyarthee* by providing instances of his greatness. That can be discovered by others, if they so desire. However, the present work is neither a eulogy nor a biography. I am not going to earn any glory by penning his biography. The man, whose entire life has been an open book, with every detail placed before us through his writing, does not require another biography.

This work is the result of our shared journey spanned over three decades, undertaken through literature, experienced in the atmosphere of his home. In the course of it, Ravindrabab's persona struck me with three distinct dimensions—the social, political and spiritual; this book may be seen as a comment on it all!

I started writing it in December 2002. I had resolved to jot down all the thoughts about Ravindrabab that had been coursing through my mind during our visit to Manipal and back, and present them to him in the form of a book on 7 March, 2003—his birthday.

The span covered by this writing and the duration of the thought process that went with it was merely of three days and two nights. It was not meant to cover my past or future. That is why, all that is mentioned here is strictly up to 5.00 p.m. on 24th October 2002.

I have met and discussed a variety of topics with him even after that. In the interim, his books have been released, articles have been published. But I have avoided dwelling on them or including them in this book. Had I so desired, I could have added as much as I want until the manuscript went to the press. But in my reckoning, just those three days were significant.

Whatever is said here about Ravinvdrabab is the truth

in my view. I never made it a point to ask him whether his views, opinions, thoughts have remained the same as in 1976 or have undergone change in tune with time and experience. Those that I had preserved deep in my heart are now served on paper one after another. Even Ravindrabab himself may find them out of sync.

Let us say, we suffer from customary stagnancy; or may be, we do not wish to move beyond the beaten track of tradition. With the result that, we writers, readers or critics have deemed the traditionally-in-vogue forms of literature as the only valid ones. The writers try to fit their work into those very frames; readers also look out for these familiar frames; and, the critics, reviewers and others try to analyze literature by determining as to which frame it belongs. Accordingly, a label is put on literature as per their thinking and analysis.

Such people probably imagine that writers have only been writing after someone determined matters such as form and style of literature. At least, the writers should try and disengage themselves from such pseudo-beliefs; and create new genres (forms) and styles; or, at the very least, go on writing as they wish. Let the critics place them in any frame of form or style, or even create new frames (of assessment) for the purpose.

What is the form of this work, what its style, I know not! I have not yet read the writings of like genre. Still, I am not worried about the kind of response the readers are going to give *"Shreyarthee"*. I am also not anxious over the level and the place of this book. This is my stroll, a walk undertaken …singly…. with a *shreyarthee*...with the desire (ambition) of also becoming a *shreyarthee*.....

- Dilip Borkar

Sunday, 22nd October 2002.

An air-conditioned room on the third floor of Hotel Valley View International in Manipal.

I have come to Manipal after several years.

I remember to have made a halt here en route to Cochi while on our way to attend the Konkani Sahitya Parishad (Konkani Literary Conference). That was way back in 1978. I cannot recollect where we had stayed then. Certainly not like this. ..in a hotel. I must have been pushed into some dorm with the others.

After that I have come here on a couple of occasions; for a literary meet or some conference. I recollect, I had stayed in some school.

But a peculiar memory is of meeting Dr. T.M. A. Pai alias Tapai, on our way to Kochi. We had paid him a visit at home. Dr. T. M. A. Pai had come out and sat down with us all. The medals with which he had been decorated, were all brought and put around his neck, and he spoke to us with those medals on. I cannot recollect what he had spoken about.

Just like this reminiscence of Dr. T. M. A. Pai, I have a recollection of Ravindra Kelekar whom I had accompanied during most of that tour.

Linked to our visit to the literary conference, we had planned a tour to South India, and proceeded accordingly. I was in college then. ..struggling to earn while I learnt. It was 2-3 years since I had got acquainted with the people in the Konkani movement, but was yet to find somebody I could feel close to. Hardly any one I approached seemed worthy of my humble respect. Each one seemed enveloped by his own greatness. Even today, the situation has changed but little. Yet I was a part of the herd.

1977 was the Birth Centenary Year of Shenoi Goembab (alias Vaman Raghunath Varde Walavlikar). I had been appointed to look after the office of the Centenary Committee for the year …in a way.. . I was a sort of a dignified peon. ..dignified only because I wrote...composed poetry…that is why the Konkani stalwarts respected me. I would perform tasks like arranging chairs, putting up a banner, taking the press note to the press, and in return I was paid a little money. For that petty sum I had to work like a peon… bear the shouting from some of the leaders.

In appreciation of my service rendered during Shenoi Goembab Birth Centenary, I was given an opportunity to go to Kochi for free. That is what I feel now! Perhaps I had paid some money for that travel too. But there was no seat reserved for me in any one of the mini buses. Every one else had a definite seat. But I was pushed into any bus where there was place available. Perhaps, Ravindra Kelekar could not bear to see this situation …a situation….in which I was pushed around and so he gave me a constant seat by his side.

After having been thus associated with Ravindra Kelekar, until we returned to Goa I was in his mini bus …by his side. How he walks, how he talks, what he eats…I was witness to it all. My first visit to Manipal was with him and today this is the second time. That was 25 years ago. I used to call him Ravindrabab then. Today I call him Tato.

'Tato, tell me when you want to take your tablet. I will get you a glass of water' I tell Ravindrabab. We had finished dinner in the suite itself. In between, Girish had come in to inquire whether anything was required. I asked him not to worry about us.

'Oh! You are there with him..! Both of you are writers....... I do not wish to disturb you. I will get back to my room'.

So saying, Girish went away.

Girish is Ravindrabab's son! He and his son 'Tobu' are staying in the room next door. He had arranged to have me share quarters with Ravindrabab.

This was metaphorically speaking, a festive occasion for me. Had Girish stayed with Tato and given me a separate room instead, I would have told him,

'Girish, you please share a room with Tobu. I would like to stay with Ravindrabab.'

But Girish must have planned this already.

'Shall we have a fag before retiring for the night?'

Ravindrabab asked drawing out his packet of cigarettes. He smokes Wills, I smoke Gold Flake. I took out my own brand.

'Tato, shall I open windows? It's an AC room. If the smoke gets accumulated, it will bother us when we sleep'.

He nodded.

I drew the window panes aside. Clean air from outside gushed into the room. We both lit up...

Earlier, I never used to smoke in front of Ravindrabab. Interestingly, I don't really 'care' for anyone. But somehow it

had always made me feel 'guilty' to smoke in front of him.

Once, I had dropped in, at his house at noon. After lunch, we came out and sat in the verandah. Ravindrabab drew his cigarette packet and held it before me.

I had been watching his style of taking out the cigarette, lighting it... Perhaps he felt I was looking on with desire for a fag....

'No, I don't want'. I said shyly, when offered one.

'You smoke, don't you?'

'Yes, off and on'.

'Then have one. There's no need to feel embarrassed'. He said offering me a cigarette. I took it. Ravindrabab himself lit it. My hand, holding the cigarette, was shaking. Am I exploiting the goodness of this great man..?

'One should have at least one indulgence', Ravindrabab said drawing deeply on his cigarette and exhaling the smoke. 'But one thing. Do not let the cigarette control you. You should never become a slave to addiction'.

I looked at him as I smoked on...This man appeared so different at that moment...!

I had met several persons who had tried to philosophise and suppress those who were lesser in age or in knowledge. But here was a man who in spite of his greatness treated others as equal and sought to dispel their inferiority complex. He was so very different from the rest. Such are the persons, who deserve to be respected here on this earth...They don't need to insist on the outward pretence or show of respect. They earn it automatically...

The fag was over. It must have been past ten-thirty at night. Ravindrabab was tired. Since morning, he had not been able to lie down. He had the habit of a .... nap. But the day long journey had not given him the chance to take it.

I wanted to chat with him ... But there was a big gap between his age and mine... I go to bed at midnight. It was doubtful whether I should fall asleep now. If I should start reading, the light may disturb Ravindrabab's sleep.

'Tato, shall we retire for the night?' I asked.

He was waiting for the offer. Promptly arranging his bed for him, I put off the lights, and lay down quietly in my own bed. The room was dark. But the curtains had been drawn. Through the window panes, the vast sky was visible. A myriad stars were aglitter. In the valley below too, the lights were shining. This hotel must have derived its name from this valley. From our room the valley was clearly visible, and so was, much of Manipal.

'Tato, have you not written anything on Dr. T. M. A. Pai?'

'Perhaps...a little...long back...can't remember for sure... But Sumant (Kelekar) has written an article on him. A true modern-day *rishi.* Illustrating with concrete example the meaning of *co-operation* and strengthening the common man. A visionary, who established such a huge empire out of nothing. But his 'dream' of those days is lost today. Everything has become commercialized... Wonder if Girish has gone to bed! Tobu... too did not come ..."

'They must be asleep. Want me to call them?'

'Oh, no! He must be anxiety-free since you are with me.'

His words sounded heavy. Sleep was spreading her gentle wings over him. I decided not to say anything more and remained silently lying in bed.

He is a thinker...this man... But nonetheless...he's still a father! These were the two aspects of one and the same person. It was but natural to think of one's son... miss one's grandson. An individual cannot be totally free from desire. After all, it is the father's prerogative to worry...to care... to be anxious...

With starkly open eyes, I stare at the sky. It is best to lie silently watching the glory of the starry realm above. Why close the eyes? They will close on their own when sleep comes ... these thoughts will also cease ... until then... let the mind roam free...

I had suggested to Tato, that just the two of us should go to Manipal. I had my car. He had agreed. But Girish said, he would come along too ... wouldn't like to send Tato with me ... alone. He brought his own car too...wanted to drive it himself...

We had left Priol in the morning, Girish at the wheel. Tobu was seating by his side. Tato and I shared the back seat.

I had offered to drive ... asked Girish whether I should!

He had said, 'No, Tato is going to be on the seat behind.' He didn't let me drive at all during the journey. Ravindrabab even suggested to him 'Let Dilip drive for a while.' But Girish was reluctant to do so. Finally, I gave up asking him. Let him go at his own speed. Anyway, we weren't in a hurry. Had no work slated for the day. The award function was scheduled on the following day.

Every year, Dr. T. M. A. Pai Foundation in Manipal, selects outstanding writings in Konkani and the authors are felici-

tated with the awards sponsored by them. Ravindrabab was to be so honoured (with the top award) for the year 1999. I had been given the second one. These chaps have a faulty way of giving awards. The first book is awarded Rupees twenty five thousands, while the second is given a meager Rupees two thousand. The felicitation and the honour is the same. But with this difference in the amount of the award that anyone may feel insulted (to be placed second).

But I did not feel much about this. In this case, money was not important. For me, being felicitated along with Ravindrabab was itself an honour. That was the reason why I had written to the Foundation that I would be accepting it. Had I been given the second award by giving the first to someone else, I would not have accepted the award. ..I would have considered that to be demeaning. . .a come down!

I have always felt that there is something common between Ravindrabab and myself. I have been always convinced by his thinking. Time has also bestowed some similar things on us both.

Ravindrabab had won the Sahitya Akademi's award for his travelogue, *Himalayant.* My own travel-lust had been considerably honed after having read that book.

On account of trekking, I too had traveled across Himachal Pradesh, and written *Gomanchal te Himachal* for which I was given the Sahitya Akademi award - also for travel writing in Konkani.

Those who win the Sahitya Akademi award are honoured and felicitated by the Akhil Bharatiya Konkani Parishad (All India Konkani Conference). When Ravindrabab had won this award, Conference was being held at Kochi in 1978, and Ravindrabab was presiding over it. With that, he was also felicitated for having been decorated with the (first ever Sahitya

Akademi) award for Konkani.

In 1996, the Conference was being held yet again. That year I had been honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award for my travelogue, *Himalayant* (1995), and I was being felicitated in this same land. In 1978, when Ravindrabab was being felicitated, I had been among the audience watching him receive the honour. Now when I was being felicitated at the same venue, he was not present there. Had he been, that would have been my greatest honour!

I had had another opportunity of being honoured along with Ravindrabab. In 1995,he was chosen for the 'Vishwa Konkani Sahitya Ratna' (Jewel of the Konakni World Literature) by the World Konkani Sammelan (World Konkani Meet). The joy that the most deserving person had been selected for the honour was incomparable. It was as if, the World Literary Meet had enhanced their own prestige by choosing him for this prestigious award. In that Meet, Ravindrabab was felicitated in a grand, glorious manner.

On the way to this Meet, I received the news that my book has won the Sahitya Akademi award. I was overjoyed with the tidings. Winning a national honour is not a small thing. And—I was not a hypocrite to say with superficial modesty that I did not deserve it 'so soon'.

I wanted to break this news first of all to Ravindrabab. I believed that he would be as happy as I had been to hear it.

As soon as I checked into a hotel, I found out in which hotel Ravindrabab had stayed. I gave him the news with much expectations and enthusiasm.

Ravindrabab laughed into the receiver, at the other end of the phone, and said,

'That is a conspiracy, man. Where is that conspirator?'

I was stunned to hear these words. Did that mean that Ravindrabab was not happy to hear that I had won the award? Does he really think that my getting the award is a conspiracy, or is there a sarcastic critic in him, that caused this comment?

I was completely off mood. I could not understand at all, why he of all persons— whose greetings I had expected and whose congratulatory words would have given me more happiness than the actual award itself — should pass such a comment?

Until the award had been announced, I had not the slightest inkling of whether I was being considered for it or that I was going to get it. I had learnt that the previous year, this same book of mine had been in the reckoning. But I had not got the award because the book was published prior to the three-year mandatory limit of eligibility for consideration. I was also not aware that recently the time-limit had been extended to five year-span from the date of publication; nor of the fact that Ramesh Veluskar had been on the selection committee. In fact, he had been with me on the way to Mangalore, and when the news was flashed in the national telecast of Doordarshan, he was also with me.

We saw the news telecast. Then called the offices of various newspapers to confirm it. When we called *Sunaparant* (the only Konkani daily published from Goa) we learnt that Shankar Ramani had been given the award. How could this be possible? Was the news that we had heard on Doordarshan false, or were these chaps telling a lie? Who is conspiring here?

The following year Shankar Ramani won the Sahitya Akademi award. Ravindrabab wrote in *Jaag* that Shankar Ramani had elevated the Sahitya Akademi (by being honoured by it). Why did Ravindrabab not express the same sentiments the previous year, with regard to me? Or was that the real conspiracy?

Shankar Ramani was an established poet in Marathi. But, as a scholar, I knew the level of his Konkani poetry. I am aware of the fact that, my literary work certainly has an edge over his Konkani poetry. In spite of this, when I do get an award, how can it be deemed as a conspiracy? This very thought preoccupied me. Am I perhaps wrong in trusting people? Do I fail at some stage to recognize others? Such feelings appeared to grip me.

But I tried to convince myself. It cannot be as I think it is. There is some reason, some rationale behind every person's actions. Without having understood it, it is wrong, in fact it is tantamount to rashness, to bear a bias , for or against an individual. Ravindrabab is being honoured in the course of the Vishwa Konkani Sammelan by being felicitated for his work with the Vishwa Konkani Sahitya Ratna. On such an august occasion it is not proper that out of the cobwebs of bias, I should weave misunderstanding against him.

Now, the question was of my own felicitation and honour. Since I have won the Sahitya Akademi award also at the time of this grand Meet, it was going to be unavoidable (for the organizers) to felicitate me too. It is likely that it would be with Ravindrabab and that may be a co-incident pre-determined by Destiny. So many individuals in the world are felicitated together. But when this happens with individuals who share your temperament or views, it is a matter of unique happiness. How can I deny it? It was my deep inner wish that if at all I was going to be felicitated, it should be with Ravindrabab.

But not always is every desire fulfilled. Some antagonistic forces work against the fulfillment of some desires, and they often win..! Such is the Judas mentality…!

In one of the pandals of the Meet, some programme was going on. A Konkani stalwart, who generally never spoke a good word about me –in fact, he spoke sarcastically if he ever did—

became excited. The news that I had won the award had reached him. This excited stalwart of pre-mature-initiation rose. And dancing around the pandal, he spread this news across in a jiffy, pressed the organizers through somebody's good offices to felicitate me. That very moment, some broken medal was brought and I was led to the dais and it was handed over to me. The only satisfaction was that it was given at the hands of Shivram Karanth (noted Kannada Litterateur). Even at that moment I felt, nonetheless, O you fellas, if this has to be given then at least give it at the hands of Ravindrabab. But in the commotion of having this chore finished and done with, they hardly knew what they were doing.

He has been felicitated once! So how can he be felicitated in the same Meet once more? With this argument, I was gently excluded from the felicitation function held during the valedictory programme. In this way, my urges, latent desires, and an opportunity was lost because of someone.

I could not but help thinking, yet again : why did all this happen thus? Did I not genuinely deserve this award? Was it truly a conspiracy?

Some day, I must ask Ravindrabab about this.

But is there really a need to ask?

The year was 1977. Ravindrabab was running *Jaag*. He was the editor of that magazine. In those days, getting anything published in *Jaag* was a rare privilege. Getting published in *Jaag* meant getting recognition as an author.

I had just started writing in those days. I would compose poems. From poetry, I turned to prose...wrote a couple of one-act plays, and sent them to *Jaag*.

A few days later, Ravindrabab wrote to me.

The one-act plays are first rate. You deserve a Nobel prize. You have written that the plays should be published or returned. I am not going to do either. Write a few more. Let us publish (them in) a book (form).

Jaag never published those one-act plays of mine, nor published a compilation. But the statement, 'The one-act plays are first rate. You deserve a Nobel prize', was enough to encourage me on my future literary journey.

Konkani may win a Nobel prize, when she will. But creating the awareness that a Konkani person is capable of winning the Nobel prize, whether given seriously or with mock-seriousness , is of tremendous worth. Let alone the Nobel, but Konkani should win at least a Jnanpith and Ravindrabab should witness it. [* Note: Shri Ravindra Kelekar has been honoured with the Jnanpith Award in 2007].

Ravindrabab has always maintained:

'Whatever conquests of achievement that one can witness in a lifetime, have been mine to witness.

Goa was under the Portuguese regime for four hundred and fifty years, and in the endeavour to free her , even a nonentity like me could offer his mite, and see with his own eyes the day Goa was liberated.

Konkani is not a language at all. It is a dialect; it has no grammar, no literature—so saying, her antagonists scorned her. Any dialect needs centuries to evolve to the status of a language. But Sahitya Akademi averred that Konkani was an independent language right in front of my eyes. It was made the State language of Goa, was included in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Consttution. And. . .those who insisted that there was no literature at all in this language , could see an ample crop of literature that grew abundantly in a brief span of time. To witness all this in

the single lifetime of one generation is a good fortune seldom enjoyed by people.'

These words of Ravindrabab reflect the rightful pride of triumph wrought by his capable generation. He is, no doubt, going to witness the award of Gnyanpeeth and Nobel prize to Konakni, because he is the one who has forever striven after the *shreyas* (the desirable, the worthy, the creditable). The *preyas* (the pleasing, the likeable) holding him by the hand was trying to lead him on ...but pushing aside that hand , he persisted in walking in the company of the *shreyas.*

What hour of the night must it be? There's no way to know. Ravindrabab is in deep sleep. He is snoring in a mild rhythmic manner. I am reluctant to put on the lights, to check time. What if this should wake him up?

I close my eyelids and invoke the goddess of sleep. Had I browsed through a book as usual, I would have fallen asleep by now. Every day, I have an hour set aside for reading. Eleven to twelve o'clock at night. At twelve, the moment I hit the bed, I wake up only at five in the morning... at the stroke of the church bell. When I am travelling, this pattern changes. But then, there are friends with me...there are the drinks... and quite unawares to me the effect of the wine brings on slumber...

But today, there is a Gandhian in my company...how could I either drink in his presence ...or, leave him alone to go and have a drink...?

I open my eyes once again...fixing my gaze on the patch of the sky visible from the window pane....trying to identify the stars shimmering above...

Yet, how could I identify them? I should at least know their names. I cannot recognize any other stellar body-planet or star- than *Shukra* (Venus). Notwithstanding this, some time back

I had been addicted to sky-gazing, after having read Ravindrabab's *Brahmandantlem Taandav* [The Celestial Dance (of Shiva) in the Cosmos]. I had tried to identify the constellation known as *Saptarshi* (akin to Orion). But that meant, for me, literally a neck-breaking exercise. Thereafter, I had given up the temptation of star-gazing, and enjoyed the joy of this heavenly dance only by consulting the maps in Ravindrabab's book and reading the story of every star. If this Universe has to be known well, it should be only in the company of a vast realm such as Ravindrabab is ...!

In our Goa, there are a few institutions with their gaze fixed at the sky to get to know the universe and then to introduce it to others. If a new star is identified or a comet is visible, these institutions come into demand. People rush to them...the press heaps praises on them...there is much publicity and the government also supports their activities Thereby, they get social as well as governmental recognition.

But, there is an author-just a litterateur- inspired with the idea of bringing about social change. In the solitude of a hillock in Priol, he sits with his eyes glued to the telescope, regularly sky-gazing ...watching the sky...getting to know it ...and then he writes a book on it—that too, in Konkani. What all does this book not contain? It brings us the whole universe...introducing it to us... providing maps of the locations of stars and planets...tells stories and narrates the myths associated with them . It speaks of their birth and deaths...And, we Goans ...at least some of us...instead of getting to know this all...instead of gaining knowledge....scribble editorials titled 'The Owl in the Priol Cave'...! The reason?...This son of Konkani is trying to serve his mother tongue....I feel utterly disgusted with such an attitude and am sick of this mentality...!

Until I had come by this book, I had never given a thought to astronomy. Whenever I happened to scan the sky, I turned

away thinking that this realm is beyond my reach. That is why I had believed that the adage *'Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya'* ('Lead me from darkness to light') to be false. We are extremely petty people. We have no guts to go from light to darkness. That is why we have drawn the boundary of the horizon around us...gleefully believing that our world ends 'there'...And, so believing, we have been content to live within the four walls of the house...arguing ...now that it is night...it is dark...and only the nocturnal creatures are on the move ...Thus we have lived secured under the roof... like the proverbial ostrich burying its head under the sand.

Had we overcome our fear of the dark, transcended the boundary set to light and ventured into the limitless darkness, we would have been privy to the cosmic empire visible in the dark. What is our Milky Way? And our Sun? What is the history of the stars of immense grandeur in comparison with it? What is this earth of ours whose boundary seems to end 'there'? And, what is that 'knowledgeable' human being that dwells on it ? We would have known the answers to all these and more. But the appetite to know and the capacity to digest that knowledge seem to be starkly lacking in us. Should we try to sincerely get all that knowledge, perchance we may go off the rocker. So the wiser thing to do is to go from light to darkness instead. *Tamamsoma Jyotirgamaya..*?

I had not come across a single book on astronomy providing a minimal understanding of the outside world . In English, there are books galore on this subject. But I lacked a good grasp of the English language, necessary to understand such matter. There must be books in some of the Indian languages too. But the moot question was: would I be able to quench my thirst for knowledge by reading them? The craving, the hunger for knowledge could be truly satiated only through one's own language... as mine was...by *Brahmandantlem Taandav.*

In it, Ravindrabab says right at the outset, 'I have not written this book to provide information on astronomy. This is not a text book of astronomy. My knowledge of the subject is not adequate to dare write one. This is a work confined to the perception of an aesthete. My objective in writing it has been rather peculiar: to show that the world in which we live is indeed very beautiful...very stunning. In such an amazingly beautiful environment, it is not right to be bored of life...to be tired of existence , or even to feel disappointed or to live discontentedly. We should be able to free our mind from 'ego' and learn to look at the world around in wonderment. Then ...the innumerable streams of joy overflowing will become palpable...and the words 'life is beautiful...indeed very beautiful' will spring to our lips from the very depth of the heart. This is a voyage in the spaceship of the earth undertaken by a traveler ...just to tell you this...'

I had been observing the sky since childhood, even before I read this book. In fact, spread overhead like a coverlet, the sky does not require to be seen on purpose...it automatically comes within the range of human view. But such a view of the sky, when it becomes visible naturally, is different from such a purposeful sky 'gazing' which is distinct. On reading *Brahmandantlem Taandav,* I undoubtedly developed a passion-a veritable craze- for watching the sky. How much I could decipher on sky-gazing thus, is a different matter! Yet on watching the sky, and on reading and re-reading of *Brahmandantlem Taandav*, one thing became clear to me: 'the world is beautiful..veritably so'. From then on, the fear of death which had existed deep within disappeared; and the realization- that I am an insignificant being on this earth, which in itself is nothing compared to the cosmos, and yet it is beautiful - dawned on me.

The *kubja* (the hunchback) from the *Mahabharata* had never seen the sky in her life, living as she had been with her eyes turned inevitably to the ground. She meets Krishna...who

lifts up her chin...telling her to look up at him...when she looks up and sees the sky, the state into which she must have been then...and ...the change that came into my life at this time ...on reading *Brahmandantlem Taandav*...must have been by and large the same...!

No, no...not that I fell in love with astronomy on reading Ravindrabab's book; but after reading it, I went through quite a lot of books in other languages in order to assess the fact and fiction it contained. But I found all of them of the 'text-book variety'. They provided knowledge, but failed to offer the digestive juices to absorb it.

Brahmandantlem Taandav, not only offers an introduction to astronomy and to the universe, it also contains poetry, an ode to Nature, varied shades of colour, and most importantly, such treasures gleaned from the wealth of Indian culture that everyone must know of. It is a kind of a book that holds a mirror to self: who am I? what is my worth?

I remember the constellation of *Mriga.* We call it *Mirg* in Konkani. But presently, there was no point in trying to see it; from my bed-stead here, only a tiny patch of sky spread over the faraway valley is visible through the window-panes.

While introducing this constellation to the reader, Ravindrabab narrates the story of Bhootavat, which has a relevance even in the context of the modern day society, its aberrations and the desire to resist them. Hopefully, after, reading of it, those of us in India who have an inclination to perversion may develop the urge to fight it.

On looking at the *Mriga* constellation, three bright stars are visible. These form the arrow of Bhootvat. Just below this arrow is an extremely brilliant star. In the entire sky, there is no other star as bright and beautiful as this one. Even in the gleam of the full moon its brilliance is not diminished. That is Bhootvat.

As we watch from below, it appears as though the arrow of Bhootvat hits the stomach of the *mriga,* the deer. Of the quadrilateral of the four stars visible from below, the left two are the front legs of the deer. Between these two legs, a tiny triangle formed by 3-4 stars is also visible. That is the *mriga-sheersh*—head of the deer. The two stars to the right of the quadrilateral form the hind legs of this celestial deer. Beside the arrow, to the right, three stars appear to be scattered horizontally, they seem to glisten, like jewels wrapped up in cotton; that is the tail of the deer, the *mriga-puchcha.* It seems as though, the deer that is running towards the North is hit and appears to have halted midway in its path . Since, we can only watch from under the dome of the sky, only the feet, stomach, head and tail are visible to us.

The *Mriga* constellation is formed by nearly seventy big and small stars within the quadrilateral and outside it.

Anyone who is braced with this much information should not find it difficult to look for the *Mriga* constellation and locate it.

But who is Bhootvat who strikes the deer?

Once upon time, it seems, Prajapati, the lord of the populace, cast a lecherous glance at his own daughter. When the gods came to know of this, they were furious: what if he should be the Prajapati? Such an evil act could not be overlooked. It deserved to be duly punished. Towards that end, each of the gods gave one of his limbs to create a new god-Bhootvat. Agni entered his mouth and became *vaacha*(the word), Vayu entered his nostrils to become *prana*(the vital force), Aditya became his eyes, directions became his ears, Moon, his heart. Thus this new god more powerful than all the rest was sent to kill Prajapati.

On seeing Bhootvat, Prajapati, who had committed so depraved an act as bore no comparison with the most heinous, assumed the form of a deer and bolted away. However, Bhootvat

aimed at the stomach of the deer and killed Prajapati.

To date, somewhere or the other, such 'Prajapati-s' continue to molest their daughters. We do come to know of such shameful acts; but we hardly come together to form a new being who can destroy them. Thereby, the depraved Prajapatis and their ugly perversion have been granted a perpetuation of sorts. Perhaps, by learning about and watching the *Mriga* constellation, such perverts may be driven with the terror of death or retribution.

As one reads through such interesting tales about every other star, one finds recreation along with knowledge. Now, as I watched the stars shining far away, I felt the book should have been with me. But mind promptly quizzed, 'what have you been reading all this while, then?' In a way …it seemed… I had not skipped my daily ritual of reading for an hour before going to sleep… even tonight…!

Ravindrabab had taken two years to complete *Brahmandantlem Taandav*. He had then taken it to Bakibab Borkar, a born poet, who was known to look at or admire anything from a poetic point of view. Ravindrabab, on the other hand, was a prose writer. He had hoped that Bakibab would read the manuscript. He did and on completing it said, 'this is no ordinary book. This is sheer poetry of astronomy.'

Any reader of the book is able to appreciate how apt Bakibab's comment has been! In fact, when someone like me watches the vast realm of the sky, its colour, its forms, its appearance and its celebration of light , what wells up in his heart is 'poetry incarnate'.

I did not realize when sleep had gently descended into my eyes.

'Dilip, shall we get up?'

Ravindrabab asks as soon as he wakes up. I had no idea when I had fallen asleep.

'Where are we required to rush so early in the morning? The function is in the evening . Why not loll in bed for a while?' said I, wrapping myself up into the coverlet. Every day, at home I rise early. Anyway, today there was going to be no morning walk, no newspaper.

'Such laziness won't do. At this rate, how far will Konkani go?' Ravindrabab chuckled to himself as he followed my example in drawing the cover around himself.

But someone was at the door... knocking. I opened the door to find Tobu, Ravindrabab's grandson there.

'Aren't you going to get up, Tato? How long are you sleeping?'

So saying, he went away banging the door shut behind him.

Now that I was out of bed, there was no point in rushing back to it.

Tato had also risen. The room had just one bathroom. So only one of us could have used it at a time. I let Tato go in first and picked up the morning papers. But what local news of interest could I find in a Mangalore paper? The same that we had seen on the T.V. the previous evening. Casting the newspaper

aside, I drew the curtains open.

The valley in front of me had been covered with a sheet of fog. The sun had risen quite high but had not ascended fully. Through that cover of mist, he looked like a toddler in his milk teeth...stumbling to stand up...I felt somewhat cheated...had I risen at dawn as usual, I would not have missed that unusal sunrise..!

'Tato, we just missed a beautiful sunrise.'

I said to Ravindrabab, who had emerged from the bathroom, wiping his face. I had expected that he would say something pithy regarding the sunrise. Ravindrabab as also the other Konkani stalwarts have often visited Manipal. I am not so sure about the others , but Ravindrabab must have surely seen the sunrise here. He has that aesthetic streak in him...he might have watched it in its varied aspects...The man is a born traveler... with the typical traveller's gaze...wherever he goes, he communes with Nature.

People like me should learn a thing or two by observing how we respond to nature , and how others have been touched by it...

'The sunrise is not meant for us...it is not destined for the likes of us...watching sunrise is the task of passive minds...to watch it... and then soar into the realm of poetry... You go and order breakfast for us, and finish your routine chores still left to be done...Don't you waste your time watching the sunrise...'

I went on staring at him. I had surely expected a different response than this. How could this man who has written *Uzvadache Soor, Himalayant, Vellevoilyo Ghulo* and the like, act so prosaic? I was nonplussed.

Can the author of *Uzvadache Soor* be like this? In those days, on reading his essay with that title, so many youngsters

like me had been directed to move towards light....And now...

Years ago—Baba, Ravindrabab's father had told the young lad that a huge comet was visible in the east at dawn. Ekerya-Seki was the name of the comet that drew Ravindrabab from the warmth of his bed...and in thus rising early to catch the comet...Ravindrabab had gradually discovered his own *Uzvadache Soor* (the melody of light).

Earlier, Ravindrabab would chant the *shloka-s* (verses) from the *Upanishads* when he woke up early in the morning. Eventually, he had become used to humming the melodious notes of light. The literary work that grew out of this experience was an orchestra of the varied rhythms found in nature.

The various aspects of nature, the life of trees and growth of vegetation, medley of birds and beasts, the myriad shades of the east and the west , the cool mid-afternoon...the description of the numerous shades of light from dawn to dusk ...have all been so observed and captured by Ravindrabab's pen, that a person like me is drawn towards light, after having read it.

'Why everyone is fascinated by the moon light, I know not!' The one who could pose this query ...the Ravindrabab who could so enchant us with his melody of light...how could he do this ...act like a wet blanket to my enthusiasm by asking me 'where is the sunrise in our destiny?'

Calmly, I lifted the receiver and called the room boy ...picked up my toothpaste and brush..and quietly moved into the bathroom...

Girish came in. He had already placed an order for our breakfast long back.

I felt relieved. He knew best what would suit Tato for breakfast and what would not. Accordingly, he sent the room boy away.

When I emerged from bath, Girish had returned to his room. The room boy delivered our breakfast. Asking him to leave, I served Tato whatever he preferred to have, and also helped myself.

All my tasks were going on silently. The Manipal sunrise was still mounting in my head.

My mind went back to reminiscences about our journey across South India in 1978.

We had arrived at Kanyakumari. I must have been around twenty-one or so. Ravindrabab must have been in his fifties then. I should have mingled with those of my own age-group, giving way to youthful tendencies. But here was I, spending time with Ravindrabab. ..listening to whatever he had to say about each and every place in our itinerary.

This spot is the hallowed point of mingling of three waters—the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal.

The sand along the sea-shores of Kanyakumari is tri-coloured.

The virgin lass, Kanya Kumari –the picean-eyed-Meenakshee, waiting expectantly to espouse God Shankara with a floral garland in her hand.

And—Ravindrabab's commentary on all this!

'The meeting of the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and

the Arabian Sea...is a living example of what meeting really means.Three vast water-bodies. Each with a distinct existence. Distinct identity. But all three meet at such a point where there is not a jot of reluctance or indifference. The experience of how to mingle with one-another while still retaining one's own distinction is something that can be learnt best at this spot. Here, the three seas forgetting their grandeur and respectability, mingle with one another in such an ardent manner as to drive any lovers to hang their heads shame.'

Ravindrabab and Godubi. Theirs was a love-marriage. Love lasts till urges of youth are strong. Once a baby is born, the mind of the mother is pre-occupied with the child. The husband remains busy in his own matters. I had gauged these things with observation and derived experience. But in the present case, I have always found Ravindrabab and Godubai to be an exception to this general norm. It is but rare to find a couple so intimately involved with eachother, at so late a stage in life. Only such individuals have the (moral) right to comment on the meeting of oceans and seas.

I was being given a new insight into life, and nature.

'If one comes to Kanyakumari, one should watch the sunrise here. More than that, the event that unfolds on the full moon night. On this occasion, one can witness the moonrise and the sunset, simultaneously. The moon and the sun apparently of the same size. The radiance of both is different. Both most enticing.' Ravindrabab had said.

I too wanted to watch that play of nature. It was not a full moon night; though it was one of those close to it. I had visited that spot with him. We had witnessed the sun and the moon at the same time. Even otherwise, the moon can be seen when the sun shines, albeit it is dull and listless. But here was the moon, shining in its full gleam, and the sun was setting with its own natural brilliance. One was at one end of the horizon, the other at

the other end!

I had had the good fortune of seeing, experiencing and storing all this in the depth of mind––only due to the aesthetic sensibility which Ravindrabab had possessed.

But this Ravindrabab, now says, where's the sunrise destined for us? It is to be admired by the poets. The passive folks. Is a poet a passive individual?

'I am aware of what's going on in your mind', Ravindrabab said, placing the cup of tea on the table to light a cigarette.

'We are also fated to witness the sunrise. But that is yet to come. It's of self-respect, capability. We ourselves will have to bring it in. We have just risen from the dark dungeon of enslavement. However, once again, we have been overcast by the shadow of expansionism - a colonialism of sorts. To be liberated from this, to resist the linguistic aggression made against us, we have had to march through harsh sunlight.'

Ravindrabab was speaking from the bottom of his heart. His voice was calm but its intensity was palpable to the heart.

'But Tato, we have got Statehood for Goa, Konkani has been made the State Language, included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Now what's the worry?'

'All that is only theoretically speaking ...It appears so! It is like a sterile spouse-hood. The cultural aggression is more perilous...As long as we do not rule ourselves through Konkani, as the language of administration, and establish our own capability beyond any doubt—all this has no meaning.'

'But we are going about doing all that, aren't we? Does that mean that we should not admire nature? How does experiencing poetry in nature tantamount to overlooking one's capability?'

Ravindrabab smiled.

'I do not mean to suggest thus. But I do not like, at all, those who merely admire nature and pretend to be poets. Those are pointless bluffs. The job of the do-no-gooders. Writing prose requires diligence. It is a very trying task...a huge responsibility. Writing poems can be done in a jiffy, and one wins fame as a poet swiftly too. No doubt, this adds to the poetic wealth of Konkani. But these are folks who are inactive vis-à-vis Konkani.'

'But...Bakibab wrote poetry too?'

'Why Bakibab alone? I too have composed a few poems.'

'Yes, I have read them. But that is precisely why I am amazed by your indignation about poets.'

'Writing poetry in order to cultivate a distinct genre... to strengthen literature... all that is fine! But these people can never be compared to Bakibab. He was so great—he was the Poet! Like the hero of some novel. He rated his principles, his loyalty to Konkani above poetry. Poetry, literature, arts are all the by-products of a given individual. Like the rays of the sun. If the rays are so strong, imagine how powerful the sun will be. Bakibab was powerful in his own right. If the occasion arose, he was prepared to give up for the sake of his ideals, principles and values, not only happiness or positions, however great , but even that breath of his very soul, Poetry, which he considered his very life.'

That Ravindrabab can speak so well of Bakibab, was for me a subject of research interest. R. V. Pandit was a poet too. But Ravindrabab's opinion of him was not all that good (or so I felt).

For that matter, I had never observed one Konkani individual speak well of another. Although they may speak well on

the face, these Konkani chaps were past masters at criticizing others behind their backs. Whether this was their salient characteristic or a component of their ideological make, I failed to know. But here was Ravindrabab singing paens of Bakibab.

I had been in close contact with Bakibab. I had had the good fortune of staying with him. I had also brought out a special issue titled *Bakivishesh* commemorating him, after his passing away. Ravindrabab had indeed written an article in that issue, but since the topic had been anyway opened, it was possible to have a little more light cast on a few facets of Bakibab's character.

'Ravindrabab, Bakibab must have been your senior by several years, wasn't he? I believe, the difference must have been at least of twenty odd years...'

'Yes, he was born in 1907. 30th November, 1907. Myself...on 7th March, 1923. He was senior to me by 18 years. Manoharbab (Manoharrai SarDessai) and I were the same age.'

'Didn't this huge difference in age affect your friendship (with Bakibab)?'

'Age does not interfere where issues such as beliefs and capabilities matter. Now look, there's so much difference between you and me...as far as age is concerned. But that does not become a hindrance to our friendship. Bakibab was indeed much older to me. The feeling of respect I bore for him was in no way compromised...he had sense...and so had I.'

'Did you know one another while still in Goa, or was it outside somewhere (that you met)?'

'In fact, I have written about all this...somewhere. Don't you people read anything at all?'

'One does not always remember what one has read.'

'I knew Bakibab while in Goa. But our intimacy grew when we were in Mumbai. I have listened to several of his Marathi-Konkani poems recited by him in person. I have witnessed how poems (literally) 'come' to the poet. He was a very great man. And a great poet too! I never heard Bakibab speak ill of anyone during his lifetime. He has never said a slanderous word about anyone ever.'

We had been sitting at one place for a long time. I decided to change the topic, but then Girish came into the room saying, 'Tato, they will come to pick us up at 4.00 p.m. See if you would like to have an early lunch and a brief nap.'

'What's the time now?'

'It's nearing twelve', I said, looking at my watch.

'Oh, then shan't we have a bath and all that? We have come to collect such a big award, haven't we? Come, get up. You, lazy fellow. This will not do. Girish, you may order our lunch by 1.00 p.m.'

Girish went to his own room. Tobu stayed back fiddling with this and that. Finally, munching a few cashew nuts and dry fruits from the table, he too sauntered away to his room, saying 'Tato, you will have your bath now, won't you?'

'Tato, you go and have bath', I also suggested.

'Since the topic has been broached, let me say this of Bakibab', Ravindraba said, 'whenever the question of principles has risen, Bakibab has stood firm like a rock ... adamantine. After Goa liberation, a Marathi literary meet was organized within a year. I said to Bakibab 'You shan't go'. And he didn't! He did not even ask me 'why?'. We all had gone ...to disrupt it...!'

'Bakibab gave a piece of his mind to Tarkateerth (Laxmanshastri Joshi) too, it seems?'

'Yes, I was present there when it happened. He had come to meet Bakibab. With him were perhaps others such as (D.B.) Bandodkar, (B.D.) Satoskar and so on. They had come to ask him whether he would be willing to accept the President-ship of the Literary Meet to be held at Satara.'

'Bakibab replied, "I have been serving the Marathi Sharada (Goddess of Learning and Arts) for the last forty years. If you are offering this position in recompense of that service, I will accept it most humbly. But if you are making this offer to bribe me so that I curb my thinking about Konkani, then bear in mind, Borkar is not a person who will sell himself."'

Tarkateerth said, "You are a creative genius."'

'"I am also an intellectual one", Bakibab replied without batting an eyelid. Had there been someone else, would he have let go of this opportunity? That is why, he is the "Bakibab", who could sing *"Where I experience the presence of divinity/ my palms fold in prayer piously"*. I have been witness to such divinity that is why my hands have ever folded in front of him.'

Ravindrabab's eyes seemed to brim up with tears, as he said this.

'Come on get up. Let us bathe in the name of the Marathiwadis (Marathi-ists),' Ravindrabab said with a witty smile on his face and went into the bathroom.

My eyes had also filled with tears.

Having received our respective awards, we returned to the hotel. Both of us had no sense of novelty as far as the awards functions go. At 4.30 p.m. we left for the venue. Guirish had

already told the organizers that there was no need to arrange for a car. We had our own vehicle. Only let us know where and when we have to reach...and we'll be there...'

The function was to begin at five. Prior to that ...for about half an hour or so there would be tea, snacks ...meeting people.

We had both gone through such functions earlier. Me...perhaps ...fewer...Ravindrabab...on countless occasions...For him this honour... may be just like another ordinary activity ...of day to day life...After all, he has been the recipient of some of the highest honours in the country!

Dr. T. M. A. Pai Foundation is an institution incepted by the people of Manipal. It takes note of people working in several walks of life and taking note of their contribution to a given field, duly honours them. Every year, the Institution also selects two best books of the year, invites the authors for felicitation and bestows the annual award on them.

Prior to this function also this Institution must have shortlisted several books and awarded and felicitated the respective writers. For them, a Ravindra Kelekar, a Dilip Borkar, and/ or any other writers who have been given this award-–are all one and the same. Selecting a book, declaring the award, organizing a function and giving away the award—all this is a part of the work that this Foundation does. This done, one of their annual programmes is accomplished. Having awarded us then, they had fulfilled a slated activity.

We had been told by the organizers that we may not expect a large crowd at the function. We, for our part also, had a fair idea of the audiences in Manipal, Mangalore and the like. Their love for Konkani is not the love of the language, or its literature per se. It is actually a GSB (Gaud Saraswat Brahmin) programme. Their way of looking at Konkani language, Konkani movement is as though it is an activity of their community.

As expected over fifty chairs in the auditorium were occupied. The organizers seemed content with that. But I wasn't! You invite a person of the ilk of Ravindrabab from so far away. Can't you then gather even some two hundred persons to listen to him? When will you get another opportunity like this to get acquainted with his views? But all this was my thinking. . .such was my expectation. I had heard Ravindrabab speak. . .and...had been impacted by his thoughts. I had read his books too. For me, he was a great writer. However, it was doubtful whether even his book chosen for the award had been read by at least the organizers, leave alone the audience! Why say doubt? I was almost sure that they had never even held it in their hands.

Function over, they closed shop after handing over to us whatever they had wanted to offer. By seven p.m. we were back at the hotel.

'So Dilip, both of you have been felicitated. Now we are free from their hold.' Girish observed as he parked the vehicle in the parking lot of the hotel. Generally, Girish does not speak to the Konkaniwadis (Konkani protagonists). Ravindrabab's friends are strictly Ravindrabab's friends. Girish has no contact with them. . .he will not even greet them at the door. Those who come, come to meet Tato, they can mange on their own. If necessary, I will tell him they are here—such is Girish's approach. . .true to his own perception of things.

Girish is not much of a talker. In fact, I have never observed him talking to any Konkani protagonists. Even when he speaks to Ravindrabab or to me, his words are measured. Even his laughter is balanced. But I have noticed that behind the façade of his brief talk and a faint smile, there is a great sense of humour in him.

'Anyway, it was a good trip for us ...all arrangements made for travel, lodge and board', he said with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes. I liked his assessment of the award function

very much.

Girish is very proud of his father…and this pride is expressed through his brief words and actions.

Once Ravindrabab had been invited for a function organized by the Saraswat Samaj. He attended the function and also addressed the gathering. The Konkani protagonists did not like this at all. Among the Konakniwadis in Goa, there is a small group known as the Samatawadis (pro-equality group). It mostly comprises Saraswats. I have never seen these Samtawadis ever marrying the daughters from their families into those of another community, nor of welcoming the daughters from other communities into their own families as brides or daughters-in-law. I have observed that they act meticulously in matrimonial matters-scrupulously adhering to their own caste, *gotras* and so on. One of these smatawadis, noticing that Ravindrabab had spoken from the 'casteist platform' of the Saraswat community, wrote an indignant article, titled "Ravindrabab, You Have Lost Us…"

This Samatawadi is a hasty beginner. He will react to any issue prematurely….without trying to understand the sentiments or the ideas behind an issue, against which he has chosen to react...he will not stop to think of the consequences of his reactions…such is his nature….! It may be about sombody's literary work, a speech, or some act, he sees it from his won spectacles and *pronto*! picks up his pen or hastens to speak…!

When this hasty beginner wrote the article against Ravindrabab, Girish was livid with rage…he said he would break his leg…should he meet him …at home or elsewhere. I am sure I should have loved this act of his!

Ravindrabab is an individual who has transcended the barriers of caste, religion, and bypassed the differences or discrimination attendant to them. It is not his fault that he is born a Saraswat or as a Hindu. I have heard him say, whatever I have

got has been given without asking, there is no point in refusing what comes your way. He also considers things like caste or religion to be personal matters. To be confined to his family!

'If this was so, how come he stepped on to the platform of the Saraswat community?' was a question that had intrigued even me.

There has to be some definite objective behind whatever Ravindrabab does. He is no longer so 'small' to go anywhere he is invited just to get promoted. He no longer needs such promotions...!

Nevertheless, he had attended that meet and addressed the audience.

One day I quizzed him about this: 'Ravindrabab, what made you go to that dais? It is the platform of a communal organization. Doesn't a litterateur like you going there imply the endorsement of their views?

'Yes', Ravindrabab said looking at me, 'but tell me one thing, will you? However much I protest that I am not a Saraswat, not a Hindu, does it establish that I am not a Hindu, not a Saraswat?'

'No' I shook my head.

'In our Goa, there are various institutions and organizations. Some of them are based on castes. Thus establishing organizations to protect the vested interests of varied groups has been going on in society for a long time. It is not something new.'

'There is nothing particularly wrong in that. But it is best that you do not go there.'

'Why so? Suppose I had been invited by the Kshatriya Bhandari Samaj or the Kshatriya Maratha Samaj or the Gujarati

Samaj, to speak from their platform, would you have said I should not go? Would you have written me off as lost?'

I had no reply to this.

'The community in which I am born also has its own limitations and drawbacks. No community is perfect here, nor is any religion. We know that '*sab dharm achche hain; sab dharm kachche hain*' (all religions are good; all religions are imperfect). So who will raise the caste from its weaknesses? And who will elevate religion from imperfection? Will someone from another caste or religion come and do it? Shall we not charge at him with the accusation of 'who are you to do this?' That would lead to communal or religious conflicts. So if in my caste, which none can deny, there are any weaknesses then the task of eliminating them or showing them forth will have to be done by me only, is it not? If I avoid going there, they will get their work done by getting someone else in my stead. But if they wish to listen to my thoughts, why should I deprive them of it? Through this pretext, if I get a chance of pointing out their errors, of plucking their ears, should I not take it?'

Ravindrabab's words had become sharp.

'Hindu religion is an important subject of my worry as well as contemplation. If this problem which steals the leisure of all, Hindu-Muslims, Hindu-Sikhs, Hindu-Christians, has to be amicably resolved then Hindu religion has to change. It has to be more tolerant. Should become all-embracing. This is what I believe. I don't think those who call themselves Samatawadis should have any objection to this statement'.

'They can't have', I shook my head in negation.

'Some people from Hindu religion turn their back on it and take on another religion. If this has to be halted then Hindu religion should become equally accessible and open to all castes within its ambit. Today it has been confined to the Brahmins. It

should not remain so restricted. That is why the privileges that the Brahmins enjoy on the religious front should become available to all the others as well. For instance, a pious Harijan should be able to hold the high seat of a Shankaracharya. Just as anybody can practice law once he obtains a *sanad*, in the same way any one who has studied theology should be able to be a *pujaree* at Mangueshi or Kavlem (temple).Everyone must have the right to perform the *Abhishek*. This is my view.'

Although Ravindrabab was elaborating his thoughts to me, I myself was of the very same opinion. Why me alone? Anybody who considers himself progressive, irrespective of which caste or religion he belongs, would not be able to jettison these views of Ravindrabab.

'I get your argument. But it cannot be maintained that all Saraswats think likewise. The Buddhist thought was akin to what you have just stated. After any willing individual was initiated with *deeksha*, he was taken to the level of *'vinay-dhara'*. Although this is not possible today, anyone, who has an appropriate degree, can be given the appropriate position.' I put forth my own viewpoint.

'If so, then the responsibility of bringing about these several fundamental changes which are needed in the Hindu religion is primarily of the Brahmins. Why? Because... upto now the monopoly of the religion has been vested in their hands. After all, most major temples are under their control, monasteries are under their sway. Besides they are the descendents of the composers of the *Smriti*-s of yore, which govern the religious existence of Hindus. That is why I have considered it my mission to knock at the door of the Brahmins—not once, but a hundred times- to make them realize their moral responsibilities'.

Although Ravindrabab spoke calmly, I sensed that he had been hurt by my query. But how could I help but pose it? How else can his stand in the matter be gauged? When I told him this,

he exclaimed, 'Should I say the same things time and again? You people do not read properly, do not listen carefully. Am I to be held responsible for that?'

Ravindrabab was definite about his objectives and the thinking that went behind them. But he had been hurt by the fact that the very Konkani community, whom he had guided as a social activist towards a proper intellectual basis, still had a 'biased' approach to thinking.

Every individual acts in accordance with a certain line of thinking, following a definite strategy. But another individual who observes him, creates his image as per his own level and intellectual capacity, and then expresses his own opinion.

'Whose weakness is exposed here? And whose level is established?

Ravindrabab has always ignored the statements made by individuals with such a temperament. Never reacting to them…

These people have interpreted even that non-reaction very conveniently to satisfy themselves, 'What reply can Ravindra Kelekar give us? Should he not have an apt reply in the first place?'

A person like me cannot even say that among such people there will be any who do not know the adage *'Hathi chale apni chal…'*.

As soon as the car stooped, Tobu opened the door in a jiffy and stepped out. Opening the rear door, he picked up the shawl, bouquet and other gifts from Tato's hands. His face was radiating joy and enthusiasm. He walked on carrying those items

as though it was he himself who had been felicitated. I was carrying the items gifted to me. People were starring at us.

Dr. T. M. A. Pai Foundation had booked us in Hotel Valley View. Here in Manipal, the T.M.A. Pai empire is spread across various fields such as the economic, the educational, the industrial and so on. Since we were the guests of their own Foundation, we were looked after very well indeed. Everyone around looked up to us with respect. With us Tobu also got a lot of attention. He too must have been happily aware of this reflected halo of his grandfather's glory.

Ravindrabab's entire family is refined. An ideal household. I have found all such things in their house, which are necessary to lead an ideal life, to enjoy a fulfilled existence. Clean, healthy atmosphere, aesthetic décor, spacious airy house. Cupboards laid out with books...and books on almost all subjects and in various languages. Every individual in this household is pleasant. No ill-will of any kind. No fights or quarrels either.

One who is born and grows up in such an atmosphere is bound to become cultured since birth. Ravindrabab had received this inheritance from his father, Rajaram Kelekar; and in turn, Ravindrabab has passed it on up to Tobu.

Generally, individuals who fall into such categories as the litterateurs, social activists, thinkers and so on, turn out to idiosyncratic. Being engrossed in their own work, their attachment with their children is often seen to be limited. I have seen many such individuals who have been engrossed in their own private world. Such people are to be found in Goa too. As such, today when households which display mutual relations of friendliness or amicability among all the family members young and old, are becoming rare, meeting Ravindrabab's family is truly a reassuaring experience. On looking at this family, I have always felt, an individual's family should be 'healthy' like this one. Else, what is the point in living on as a family under one roof just for the sake

doing so!

'Kelekars' were originally from the Mandoor village in Tiswadi taluka. During the 'infamous conversions' (at some stage after the Portuguese invasion in 1510), one of their ancestors fled the scene and reached the village of Priol. There the family began to cultivate bananas (kela-s) and selling the produce. That is how the name 'Kelekar' stuck on to them. Ravindrabab had once told me.

'What was your real family name then?'

'I have no idea.'

'In that case, how did you know that your family was originally from the Saraswat community, at all? So many family names in Goa have been given by the profession followed by individuals. With the passage of time, they have become officially Saraswats.'

So saying, I gave him the example of an individual by name 'Dande'.

Once, a particular *mahajan* of the Zambaulim temple could not make it to the meeting at the temple. He sent a domestic helper from his house as his representative along with the family *'danda'* (staff) as the identification mark. The mahajans did not know the name of the man who bore the *danda.* They duly included him in the committee formed and so the man with the *danda* came to known as a Mahajan with the family name of Dande.

I mentioned this anecdote narrated to me by someone.

'I do not believe this. People invent anything. If castes could be so altered, wouldn't everyone do it conveniently? We are Gaud Saraswats belonging to the Kashyapa Gotra, and our family deity is Goddess Mahahlakshmi.'

'Do you believe all this?'

'What is the other alternative? *Jati* (caste) is one that cannot be wished away. As they say in Marathi *'jaat nahin tee jaat'* (that which can not be cast away is the caste). Hence, caste has come to stay, it does not go away. After all, I had not prayed that I be given birth within a particular caste. It has got stuck on to me by tradition. So it must be accepted. But just because some one is born in a particular family of Saraswats, he does not become a 'true' Sraswat. One who is the devotee of the Goddess of learning, Saraswati, he alone is the real Saraswat. This aspect of Saraswat-ness should be the sole dimension visible to the society, all other aspects are personal.'

Ravindrabab always reiterates this view, every time the discussion steers to castes and religion.

Brahmins have always tried to suppress the non-Brahmin populace. But why the Brahmins alone? All higher castes try to subjugate the lower castes. While they suppress those castes below their own in hierarchy, they do not refrain from shouting from the rooftops that those from the higher castes are suppressing them. This is the result of the enculturation one receives.

Due to such a pressure created by this casteistic tradition, those belonging to the lower caste tend to become psychologically weak, and they behave timidly with those of the higher caste. This mentality must be changed.

'Is it necessary to continue with the reservation given to the Dalits today?' One day, I posed the question to Ravindrabab.

I was of the opinion that, since all human beings are born equal, the Dalits do not need any reservation at present, provided they are given all the facilities essential for self-development.

'Here in Goa you cannot appreciate the intensity of the

problems faced by the Dalits. If one goes to states like Bihar, one will clearly understand their plight. When you see how the higher-ups oppress them, treat them in an inhuman manner, you feel that the human race itself is disgusting. If this is the state of affairs now, you can well imagine what sort of atrocities must have been committed on them in the past. Being so victimized at the hands of the higher castes, generation after generation, the mentality of the oppressed also becomes servile. It will have to be some generations before such mentality disappears from the social psyche. They will have to be empowered. Until such time, they will have to be given the facility of reservation.'

I had found this argument to be correct from my own experience.

I, too, would feel a little diffident whenever I visited the house of any Brahmin. In my childhood, we would be required to wash our own cups if we were offered tea in a Brahmin household. In fact, there was no need to expressly tell one to do it. One almost felt obliged to do it. In those days, neither were we aware of the casteistic aspect behind that gesture, nor did our elders ever advise us to protest against such treatment or even to avoid going to such discriminating people.

By the time the awareness of this discrimination had dawned on the likes of me, the situation had undergone a change. Perhaps because of education or may be due to the social status the incidence of washing our own cups in Brahmin homes gradually diminished. This change must have come about either because the 'maid' in the house washed the cups, or perhaps because of the realization that in meting out such treatment to others, their own social status would be jeopardized. Yet due to this past tradition- perhaps generations old- a certain sense of inferiority or the feeling that their caste is higher, ours is not, so we should be within our limits, had stuck on to the mind.

If this was the condition of persons like us, who had been

educated, had moved and travelled around, one can hardly imagine what must have been the plight of the illiterate people from the villages.

Because of such a feeling of alienation, although I had many friends from the higher community, I never felt free when I moved around in their homes. This sense of alienation is not the inferiority complex in me. Still, despite the fact that they don't believe in caste and I too can't care less, somewhere there is stumbling block.

But the day I stepped into Ravindrabab's house, and today after twenty five-thirty years, I have never encountered this obstructive feeling. How often, have I stayed on for lunch, or even slept in his house at night, but there has never been the sense of being a stranger. Never the feeling of self and the other. Move freely around, as though in your own house. Take what you want unselfconsciously…

What could have been the reason for this? I have also had food at other people's houses. Often they have affectionately forced me stay on. Yet I sense this difference between this one home and another. The reason may be that the mentality of the inmates of a given house may be getting reflected in the atmosphere of that house. That must be giving rise to such a difference in sentiment.

We stepped into our room carrying the burden of the awards. Ravindrabab's award was still in Tobu's hand. He was admiring it. I looked at my own gift items. A beautiful sandalwood box. The cheque for the amount of the award was in it.

The shawl that had been put around my shoulders at the function was still in place. I took it off and placed it on the table.

Tobu took Ravindrabab's shawl and draped it gently around him, 'Tato, let it be there, okay? You will not feel the chill', so saying he went to his own room.

After a while,Tato took off the shawl and I folded it up.

'What's to be done with all these shawls, tell me? The coconut is okay. Can be used to prepare *humann* (fish curry) or something similar. I have so many shawls lying in boxes. In Delhi, they were useful. In Goa, what can be done with them?'

'Can be sold off when somebody's felicitation is to be held', I said... tongue in cheek.

We changed, had a wash and sat smoking.

'Your speech was fine. You speak well indeed.'

Ravindrabab was complimenting me. In fact, his speech had been its usual best. Actually, I should have told him so. But here he was praising me instead.

In the course of the Konkani movement, I have listened to scores of speakers. On listening to Udaybab (Bhembre), I have felt that I too should be able to speak thus and win over the audiences. But when Ravindrabab speaks, I feel as though he should never stop.

Ravindrabab's voice is not captivating like that of other orators. His manner of speaking is calm. The stream of knowledge flows forth like a stream of *amrit* (heavenly nector). I have not often seen his speech being interrupted with claps—perhaps due to the fear that it may disturb him or cause a hindrance to the listeners. Every word he speaks is worth listening and storing for keeps in mind. In that soft, monotonal, rhythmic speech, there is still a unique intensity...and, the capacity to flare up people... as I have often experienced.

Earlier, there used to be camps conducted in village after village. I used to attend these camps. Once, Ravindrabab began to speak, I would listen as though with my life-force stored in my ears—metaphorically speaking. Due to his public speaking, some like me, have absorbed a lot of knowledge, even without having read or re-read many of his books.

'Ravindrabab, what did you feel while accepting the award?'

'It's an award after all. What's to be felt? They could accomplish their objective, I could accomplish mine. The cost incurred to publish the book has been recovered.' He replies with a smile.

'Yet, when one gets such awards, one does feel happy. At least I do. You too must have been.. .'

'It's natural to feel happy. Such awards, honours make anybody excited. Your case is different. You have still to go far. Achieve your goals as per your mite. As for me, I have received some of the biggest of awards. So not much of a novelty is left in an award for me now..?'

'You're yet to win the Jnanpith.'

'I will hardly get it.'

'Why do you say so?'

'Konkani must win the Jnanpith and I should be fortunate to see it being awarded. That is my last wish for Konkani. But I will surely not get it.'

'Why do you say so? Your name gets forwarded for the award. If anyone, then you should get it.'

'Can saying make it happen? That award has a different

procedure. I am mainly an essayist. It is not given to an essayist. But rather to one who handles all the literary forms. Instead of suggesting my name, Pundalik Naik's name should be recommended, also that of Damodar Mauzo.'

Ravindrabab continued in this vein.

'You know, no writer should have his eye to the award when he writes. He should continue to write of newer and newer things. The awards are bound to follow him automatically. But my way of looking at awards is a bit different from the rest...

'Which's that?'

'I know one thing about myself. Tomorrow, if anybody should write a history of Konkani literature then, he will not fail to write this one line about me: 'this individual did contribute a little on the intellectual front'; he will refer to me as 'one of the foundational stones of Konkani prose'. In the history of literature, getting even this much reference is a matter of huge fortune for anyone. In addition, say, in the following generation, having come across such a reference of me, if somebody out of sheer curiosity should actually get one of my books from a library to browse through—that shall be the highest honour for me.'

The door opened. Girish entered the room.

'Tato, I have ordered dinner. Eat a bit early and go to bed. Don't go on talking through the night. We have to rise early tomorrow.'

'What time are we leaving, then?'

'As early as is possible. Or else, you will be uncomfortable in the late-morning heat.'

'We'll leave by six'. I suggested and Girish left us at that.

After a little post-dinner chat, I suggested to Ravindrabab that we should retire for the night.

Although we want intimate moments with someone, there is always a point when a person feels, enough. Now let's stop. ..for today.

This applies not only to the company of a human being. Anything, even nectar may make us feel so, if we should drink it in excess. At least, I feel so. Ravindrabab may also have felt so! I always try to gauge the mind of the other, his emotions and thoughts from my own. If I can feel about another –not boredom- but that I have given him a lot of time and now he should leave me alone, then others may also be feeling likewise about me.

We have both been together, since yesterday. Have been talking and just talking. I still feel like talking to Ravindrabab. But does he also feel so? Or he needs a little privacy, a little solitude? Privacy is not solitariness. Even in the same room with another, one can enjoy solitude.

If I go on chatting, because I want to, Ravindrabab may also go on talking to me just to make me feel good. But what brilliance would such conversation have?

I visit Ravindrabab at least once or twice in a month. Of late, perhaps, once a month. But earlier, I would certainly go once a week. Go in the morning, chat on different subjects. Have lunch together. But after lunch? He is used to a post-lunch nap. But I have no inclination for this post-prandial pleasure. Should he stay up for my sake? So...I would myself suggest to him, 'Ravindrabab, why don't you lie down awhile? I'll be fine.'

If I wished to stay on, I would spend time browsing through a book or do something similar; if not, I would start for home at

that afternoon hour.

At a certain moment, one does need privacy.

It was nearing ten. I was feeling a little heavy and tired too, although neither of us had done any strenuous activity, nor undertaken travel as we had the previous day, to speak of feeling tired. The whole morning had been one long stretch of rest with the award conferment function in the evening. Still I had this feeling of exhaustion. Perhaps, due to the function itself!

Once Ravindrabab lay in bed, I put off the lights and lied down quietly in mine.

I had no idea, when sleep would hold me in her thrall. Although tired, it was just ten. Is this the time to go to sleep? This feeling made it near impossible to surrender to sleep.

There was a television set facing me. But it was madness even to think of putting it on. Had I been in Girish's room, I could have said to him, 'you go to sleep; I'll watch T.V. for a while.' Or, I might have sat reading something. But here I did not have the liberty! Ravindrabab's care was my responsibility. That was the most important thing at the moment.

On the way to Mainipal, I had carried a few copies of Ravindrabab's award-winning book *Tathagat* and some of my own book *Rooksha-Prashn*... just in case, some people present at the function might want a copy of the books for which the awards were being given. But not a single soul touched the books even to browse through them. They were still lying in the box of Girish's car. That is, barring a copy of each book purchased by T.M.A. Pai Foundation for their library. That much gesture demonstrated by them was, in fact, more than expected.

I had not expected that my book, *Rooksha-Prashn*, would be purchased by these people. Had they done so, it would have made me happy. I won't deny it. But at the very least, I had

hoped that the first award-winner *Tathagat* at least should reach some persons in the audience. Even now that was the thought whirring in my head.

There was no doubt that the T.M.A. Pai Foundation had shot up their own credit by presenting the award to Ravindrabab's *Tathagat*. But it was a worrisome state of affairs, that none of those present here was keen on finding out what this book was about or even whether it was worth giving it the award.

Those who had gathered at the function were all Konkani people... their contact with Goa is as Konkani people. That is the one strand that still binds them to Goa. But what kind of a contribution have these people made for the sake of Konkani?

In securing the rightful place for Konkani in the annals of the nation, what has been the contribution of those Konkanis spread outside Goa? This had always been a moot question for me.

History tells us that in 1939, Madhav Manjunath Shanbhag organized the first Konkani Conference in Karwar (in Karnataka) and initiated an era of (Konkani) awakening.

This gave rise to the realization that the Konkani community, dispersed across different regions, would eventually merge and dissolve in the other linguistic communities (in their proximity), and thereby, would disappear (if left disintegrated). So, this whole endeavour was undertaken only to integrate the Konkani society. It was not to enrich its language, nor to ensure that it is put to use by one and all. That kind of effort was made only by the Goans. If it had not been for this effort, the Konkani language would never have got the recognition that came her way. And in such an eventuality, the language having no recognition would have remained confined to speaking within the four walls of the house and the Konkani people outside Goa would have remained content with the idea of the 'Konkani community'. Why

'would have' remained content? They *are* content with this idea indeed. That is why, the people who had come for the function, had not come out of any love for literature or litterateurs. They had come as members of the 'Konkani society'; and for them Konkani society means the 'Saraswat community'. It was sheer madness on my part to expect that these people would appreciate literature and that they would jump at a Konkani book and purchase it.

These people have never understood 'who' is Ravindra Kelekar, and there is slim hope that the following generation will do so. O you lucky fellows, he is the man who spent his entire life to work for getting the Konkani language, which is mark of your identity, her pride of place in the national arena, by creating literature of all forms unfolding new thinking...and here are you, not even interested in buying one of his books just to read through it? What kind of unfortunate chaps are you? You are not driven even to buy a book of this man whom you have felicitated, to preserve it in your homes and thereby embelish them in the true sense of the word?

One thing is sure. Feeling truly happy on reading a good book and wanting others also to read it, is a unique accomplishment of a refined spirit. I am not prepared to consider those who lack this aspect of culture as wholesomely refined. I do not think there will be anyone, who having once read one of Ravindrabab's books will not also be eager to read the others!

The book, *Tathagat,* that has been honoured today with an award by the people of Manipal-or say one of its institutions - is like a feather in the crown for the Goddess of Learning herself.

Scholars from different languages have written on the life of Lord Buddha. Our own Goan, Dharmanand Kosambi too has written on this subject. But prior to reading *Tathagat*, I had not read any book on the Buddha. I had never felt on a priority

basis that I should read one and get to know about him. In fact, my opinion of the Buddha had not been very positive. After he had become the 'Buddha', he had preached the teachings of Buddhism and the religion spread. That was all fine, by me. But at the age at which, one forms one's views, the Buddha had been presented to me in a peculiar manner. In fact, the manner of that presentation itself became one reason for me not to approach Buddha.

In our school syllabus, there was a lesson on Buddha. It was in Marathi. Who had written it or from where it was taken, I cannot remember at this stage. I also have no memory of who had taught it, nor any idea as to what was his understanding of the Buddha. But the picture of the early Siddharth and the latter Buddha whom I understood and which remained etched in mind for a long time was thus:

Shuddhodhan was a king. Being the king implies power, wealth and enjoyment of material life. Ruling over the people was a part of it too. Siddharth was the son of this king, Shuddodhan. He was a prince. The king does not let his invaluable son come in any contact with the common people. He does not let the prince witness the ordinary sorrows of life. It had been predicted at the time (of his birth) that the prince would lose interest in life, if we he were to witness grief and would renounce the kingdom (and the world). That is why Shuddhodhan provides prince Siddharth with all kinds of enjoyment within the confines of the palace walls, taking the utmost care to ensure that the basic causes of sorrow such as poverty, diseases, pain or even old age, are in no way brought to his notice.

Suddhodhan is a king. Taking care to ensure that his kingdom has a successor is his kingly obligation. He undertakes to fulfill it. But in so doing, he prevents his growing son from coming in contact with his future subjects. Furthermore, he almost imprisons him within the four walls of the palace, albeit with all comforts provided for! What kind of kingship is this? What kind

of political ethics is this? As a father his actions may be justified perhaps, but how does he 'form' the prince who is expected to be made into an ideal king?

Yet, Time overturns the applecart of Shuddhodhan. One day, Siddharth sees everything he is not permitted to see—poverty, ailments, suffering at old age, and wonders what all this is! He seeks to find a way out of all this suffering.

Then comes the description of his departure. His wife and infant son are in deep sleep. They are dreaming fond dreams. At this juncture, without waking them up, Siddharth proceeds on to becoming the Buddha with one final glance at them.

What kind of departure is this? This is running away from reality. Had he really found self-realization, then he would not have been overcome by the fear that his wife, father or mother would dissuade him from his resolve. In a way, he had cheated them. My feeling at that time had been somewhat like this...!

Subsequently, I had picked up a little Buddhist philosophy here and there. But that was done just to be able to speak if required on Buddhism, its philosophy and the like. After all, a teacher must needs have all kinds of information up his sleeve. But I had never felt like deeply engaging with that view. The book I read deeply and intently was *Tathagat.* That, too, was done with a view to understand the philosophy of Ravindra Kelekar and his perspective on life by reading all his works. When I read *Tathagat*, I realized that there was a Siddharth also lurking inside me.

Siddharth is one such persona which dwells within every human being born in this world. Everybody spends his childhood in playing, studying, and the like. Then he steps into youth...

This period of youth is the most triumphant phase of his life. The desire to enjoy all the comforts and luxuries of life, the

tendency to look upon the world with an attitude of superiority, living with the unique intoxication of being all-powerful..believing there is none stronger than him..nor will there be…! But this attitude reaches a point where it is accosted by a leper, a diseased person, or one enfeebled to the utmost by old age; and, that is the moment which makes him think: hey! This force and enthusiasm for living, this strength of the body –is this for keeps or am I going to be like one of these? Have I alone been blessed with immortality or do I have my share of death too?

This moment ..and such thinking about it all.. shakes the very foundation of his entire life and he begins to think of existence. .. all this which has been is not the reality. The reality is yet to come my way…And from here on, every Siddharth begins the quest of life. What is the Truth? This question confounds him. Then his thinking veers towards, how to escape from all this and win over everything. He begins to find all the bonds, love and affection, relationships —everything –superficial. His mind is at war in an attempt to seek release from it all. That is the most decisive period of one's life. Every ordinary mortal cannot resolve this siege within. He is so very engrossed in day to day life, that eventually, he is led to believe that it is the ultimate reality to which he finally surrenders and wiggles forward in the life ahead. But one desirous of *Niravana* breaks all bonds. He is the one who comes to be the Buddha.

I had a certain misunderstanding about *Nirvana*…thinking that it meant seeking freedom from all activity in life... leading a life of renunciation...and so on. I used to feel...what is the use of detaching oneself from life…while living in the world…and, while tasting its joys…?

After reading *Tathagat*, I was amused on realizing the kind of misconceptions about *Nirvana*, which I had nursed in my mind.

Nirvana is not destroying yourself. *Nirvana* means seek-

ing liberation ...from grief...and, earning the greatest of happiness.

We have our own strange ideas of happiness. When we are not able to fulfill these, when our expectations are not met, we tend to be unhappy. God does not send sorrows. Nor does Fate bring them along. Man himself creates them. There is way of doing away with sorrows, and the Buddha shows us that path.

Sheel (character), *Samadhi* (meditation), *Pragya*(rational thinking) are the three steps of the Buddhist worship: moving from *Sheel to Samadhi,* and from *Samadhi* by seeking *Pragya* moving on to *Niravana. Pragya* implies the ability to see life as it is, in its real form.

The Buddha termed his religion as *Ahipassika dhamma. Ahipassika* means 'come, see, test on the touchstone of intellect and accept it, if it measures up'; such is this religion.

We have heard of several prophets and initiators of religions preaching and propagating that theirs is the only true faith, better than all the others which are no good. Those who have not embraced 'such' religions have been shown various kinds of allurements and baits. There have been efforts made to spread religions with the sword; in fact, they are still being made. But the Buddha was the first to say, accept this religion if you are convinced or give it up. Thus, it would have been a surprise if the Buddha, who spoke against 'silently accepting any principle, that is propagated without any testing of it', should not be close to hearts of people like us.

Although, all his theological thought is convincing, the most appealing is his notion of giving *'deeksha'*.

Every initiator, propagator naturally feels that his religion should progress; it should reach out to maximum number of people. That is why when individuals are to be initiated into any

faith, the first to be taken in are the elite, the well to do, or the prestigious persons in society. The poor and the humble automatically follow suit. Sometimes, the people of the lower strata are not permitted entry for the fear that a given religion may become defiled, or that others may hesitate to seek entry into it thereafter.

But, when we see the kind of persons to whom the Buddha offers *deeksha,* the essence of his preaching and the importance of this religion become clear.

Upali was a barber. Some youths from the Shakya clan get their heads tonsured from him and having worn saffron robes, give away their wealth and apparel to Upali. On his way with this booty, Upali thinks: these youngsters have gone to seek *deeksha* without informing their families... it will take time before this news will reach them... but even before that happens, it will be revealed that their things are in my possession... and so, I may be killed with the suspicion that I have murdered them and looted their possessions. So thinking, Upali hangs their things upon a tree, and himself goes to seek *deeksha* from the Buddha.

The Sahkya youths take him to the Buddha and plead with the latter to give Upali *deeksha* before giving it to them. They argue, 'He has been a caste barber. For so many years, he has been giving us an haircut. We Shakya-s are a proud people. We do not touch the feet of any lower caste person. This caste-arrogance has to fall away from our egos. Therefore, please give *deeksha* to Upali first. So that, we will have to touch his feet and venerate him. We will stand in his presence aware that he is a senior. In this way, the false pride of being Shakya-s will fall away from our mind.'

Thereafter, the Buddha first initiates Upali into his fold and then the others.

After a few years, Upali grows to be the *Vinayadhara*, and rises to the highest position in the Sangham.

Another such *deeksha*...

In Rajgriha, there was a sweeper by the name of Suneet. His job was collecting the garbage created by people and the burying it outside the village. This was the occupation his ancestors had followed for generations. Even in those times, the very people who created the garbage, considered those who cleansed it to be inferior, taking care to ensure that even their shadow should not touch them.

This Suneet is also given *deeksha*, and in a few years, he becomes a great expert on *Dhamma Vinaya*.

The Buddha, does not initiate only the so-called untouchables into his fold, he also gives *deeksha* to a leper like Suprabuddha, along with all sorts of other people—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas as well as the Shudras...making them the knowledgeable in *Dhamma Vinaya*. And all this ...when? In the fifth century before Christ!

Today in the 21st century, when we notice the degree of our ignorance in the domain of caste and religion, and how a *so-called* shudra is still treated as *the shudra* even after having earned knowledge, we cannot but feel a sense of regret.

The Buddha does not represent just any ordinary thought. Scholars have written quite a lot on him too, but it is not what the common man may understand; rather it comprises what can confuse him. Such writing is not the kind of leisurely work, to be done during free time by those aspiring after the *preyas* (the pleasing or the likeable). It is undertaken only by those aspiring for the *shreyas* (the creditable or the desirable), and then it reveals the potential of that work. I had not read Dharmanand Kosambi earlier. After reading *Tathagat*, there was not much

need left to do so. Although I cannot claim that I have fully grasped the Buddhist thought through the medium or the form of *Tathagat,* yet whatever cobwebs of misgivings had existed in my mind were thereby dispelled. I became so bold as to maintain that I am one of the Buddha's *shravaka*-s. What does that imply? I am unable to express it. It is a distinct perception. I have come to realise that, only he who can find joy in this understanding has understood the Buddha in the real sense.There is no other happiness than finding a book which one can truly understand.

Grief is not a part of one's destiny, nor is it a God-send. Do not undertake futile intellectual jugglery. You have invited grief with your own actions. Search for its causes and on finding them simply uproot them. Your grief will disappear. Grief has its own reasons, and he (the Buddha) has shown us the way to identify them too. The Buddha tells to be self-reliant and to proceed in life with confidence.

He offers the place of devotion to rational thought, and places humaneness above all else. Being human is greater than becoming divine, he tells us.

Ravindrabab has accomplished through *Tathagat* the task of explaining all this in a simple, lucid way to the likes of me. Through him I could find a distinct way of looking at the Buddha, the Buddhist thinking and life itself. A certain fear of grief that had been tormenting my mind, could be overcome. What else does someone like me want from life?

Woke up in the morning, and opened my eyes. Where am I? Remembered I was at the Valley View International Hotel in Manipal.

Last night, I had not realized when I had fallen asleep.

Rose with a start of anxiety too. Last night, it was decided that we should rise early and leave for Goa!

What time must it be now? Must be five ..or so…in the morning. I looked out of the window pane. The curtains drawn aside to view the night-sky last night had been still drawn. Since the stars are no longer visible, it must be dawn. There was a mild twilight translucence in the room. I groped for my watch. It was five-fifteen. I glanced at Ravindrabab. He was sleeping soundly under the thick rug-like coverlet. A soft nasal sound was audible. Having pulled his arms under cover, he was lying on his side facing me, with the rug pulled up right over his ears. The twilight seeping through the window had fallen on his face. He was sleeping like an innocent babe. Isn't this the so-called mellow slumber of the pre-dawn hour?

If we have to leave by six, he will have to be woken up. It was the most trying thing for me to attempt. I decided not to commit that sacrilege. Once Girish wakes up, anyway he will either knock at the door or call us on the intercom. What is the need to rush out at six o'clock? The entire day ahead was at our disposal. As a matter of fact, none of us were Government employees who would have to report for duty. It was fine even if we left leisurely by eight in the morning.

I too decided to curl myself up under the rug again. But Girish could come at any moment to wake us up now. So what use was getting back to sleep now at five-thirty?

Getting out of the bed I came to the window. There was no question of sliding open the windows of the air-conditioned room. Yesterday, I had told Ravindrabab that we had missed the sunrise. Yesterday, it might have been so. But how could it give us the slip today also? I scanned the sky...wondering from which direction I could spot the sun rising! The direction facing the window must be the East. The room which we had been given was facing the valley. From there, the valley and the hills beyond

could be seen. Towards the right, a few buildings were also visible.

I began to look out for the sun. It was an October morning. There was dense fog all around. A bluish halo was cast over the valley and above that was the grayish fog. For a long time, I waited for the sun to rise. In between, I also kept looking at Ravindrabab off and on, to see whether he was awake. Seeing him in that state made me smile to myself. He who struck the notes of light and enamoured us of light, was in a deep baby-slumber, and here I was, waiting for the sunrise.

'Dilip, you're up?

'Yes, Tato.'

'What's the time? Is Girish awake?'

'No idea. It must be around quarter to six. Girish may have woken up.'

'In that case, we'll have to rise too. Come, let's get to work..'

'You use the bath first. I'll look out for the sun.'

'Had I not told you yesterday, we have no sunrise destined for us so early on...'

Ravindrabab said with a smile, briefly glancing outside.

'I'll go... brush my teeth...you keep watching the sun...', so saying he sauntered into the toilet. It was nearing six, yet there was no sign of the sun.

Someone banged at the door. It was Tobu.

'Tato, you're up, aren't you? Or still sleeping? Look we are ready...' With this he rushed back immediately.

Giving up my sun-craze, I turned to have our bags ready. By the time we were all set to go, it was seven o'clock.

Before leaving, I passed a hurried glance around the room...to ensure that we had not left anything behind. Finally, I came to the window and pulled at the curtain to draw it close. My gaze fell beyond...the sun had risen a little.

'Tato, look..it's the sunrise...'

'Is that the sunrise? That is the sun in the mid-morn sky! I had fore-warned you, we are not destined for the sunrise. Come. Let us go...'

I went on looking at his face. He was right. What with the fog... the sunrise of Manipal had not been intended for us...

So... Ravindrabab knew this all along then!

We stepped out of our room and came to Girish's. I kept on thinking of Ravindrabab's witty chuckle and smiling to myself.

At seven we left Manipal, thinking of stopping on the way for breakfast. Ravindrabab must have been still feeling sleepy. He sat with his eyelids shut. I was watching the morning-Manipal...chatting to Girish.

You may look at Girish from any angle, he resembles Swami Vivekananda. His features...nose, eyes, the general look of the face...does not fail to remind one of Vivekananda.

I do not know whether Girish or Ravindrabab have noticed this resemblance..but I find it so striking. Should he be

made to wear the *pagadi* (head-gear made of cloth) like Vivekananda, he will look identical.

If one is fully influenced by someone's thinking in toto, he begins to resemble that someone. I have no idea whether there is any influence of Vivekananda on Girish or even whether he has read Vivekananda. I have never spoken to Girish about this. Such an occasion has never arisen. Now, I felt like telling him this...but for some strange reason I did not find it proper to say it.

There can be one thing though! Perhaps Ravindrabab must have been under Vivekananda's influence at the time when Girish was born (conceived). May be Ravindrabab was studying Vivekananda at that time.

Once, when we were talking about Vivekananda, Ravindrabab had said to me that his entire life was revolutionized by that great visionary.

The age of fifteen-sixteen is a delicate phase in a person's life. At this stage, individuals develop their own views. The ambition to do something great, something extraordinary strikes one at this age. At this juncture, the influences which come an individual's way, go on shaping...moulding him.

Ravindrabab had been introduced to Vivekananda's biography at this (impressionable) age. That and the reading of the entire work of Vivekananda brought his (nascent) idealism to a boil. The patriot in Vivekananda, his dislike of slavish mentality, his anger against cowardice and weakness, his capacity to ignite the confidence and self-respect in the other—for these and such other qualities, it was no surprise that an idealist like Ravindrabab should turn to his ideology.

Is it likely that the efflorescence of such a full-fledged im-

pact of Vivekananda's influence on Ravindrabab's life may have perhaps become manifested in Girish's appearance? It is said that the influence of a person on an individual's life may alter the nature and appearance of the individual; and this may impact the baby born (to such a parent).

I had not read Vivekananda until 1977. Whatever I knew of him was from a little biography of the man and in part due to what our teachers had told us about him. But this little information at that time was not enough, I guess, to inspire the likes of me.

I passed S. S. C. E. in 1974. I had a fascination for reading from a pretty young age. What had begun with tiny little story books and monthly magazines for children such as *Chandoba*, gradually came to periodicals like *Amrit*, moved from the detective fiction of Baburao Arnalker, Kashiker, Gurunath Naik to the novels of Chandrakant Kakodkar, V.S. Khandeker, and Baba Kadam.

I had completed matriculation in Marathi medium, and having offered English as one of the subjects, also knew a few English words. The adventure of reading in English was beyond me. Yet, I was aware that there was literature besides that in Marathi and Hindi; and, although I did not read English books, the urge I felt to be acquainted with them was genuine. Moreover, even if I didn't read any books, at least a few titles and their authors were important to impress friends by dropping names. My age was such...while showing off to others what you had supposedly read, it was equally important to advise them to read such and such titles!

Around 1975-76, when I pushed into the herd of Konkani supporters, I had not read a single book in Konkani. There was no need really to meet a author in order to read his book. Although Marathi books were read by me like mad, I had not yet been lucky to meet any Marathi writer so far. Here, due to the

Konkani movement , day in and day out, I came face to face with some writer…some poet… some of them had even published their work. Yet, none of them had enticed me enough so as to draw me to his book. However, I listened to their poems or short stories as and when there was poetry recitation or a literary meet. That was about all..!

It was Ravindrabab who lured me into reading in the real sense. His personality was such that anybody would be influenced by his ideas. Given his mode of speaking, his manner of convincing others, and above all, the wealth of vast knowledge accumulated by him as result of a voracious reading—had I not been drawn to him it would indeed have been a surprise!

Here it must be said that the notion and qualities of leadership (acceptable to each person) may be relative. I am not prepared to accept that Ravindrabab's leadership qualities might have impacted my contemporaries as they influenced me. They might have been influenced by other leaders. After all, it is a matter of one's nature and preference. Although, at that time, I was under the influence of Naxalism, Communism, and though the concepts of revolution were different, my inclination was towards spirituality. Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh were my heroes…my dear deities. But I was also drawn to JP (Jayprakash Narayan). This may the reason that I was being pulled under the influence of Ravindra Kelekar.

Surely…there were other leaders in the Konkani movement. Some spoke on Marxism, Communism, and though my inclination was in that direction, I was realizing that I would not grow under their leadership… Even now, when I think neutrally about my line of thinking of that time, I find it had been reasonable.

R. V. Pandit had read the manuscript of my first-ever novel and praised me to no end. I would visit him off and on, and sit chatting with him. But I never found his persona so great as to

influence me. I was also closely associated with Bakibab (Borkar). I liked speaking to him, meeting him. His aesthetic vision of life influenced me deeply. Yet, I was under a little pressure in his presence. But with Ravindrabab, any time I went to him, however long I sat with him, I always felt relaxed...even in his house I felt free...Whether in his speech or behavior, there was a sense of freedom. Never a feeling of timidity, or one of being under pressure. What could be the reason for this?

It is an inner capacity of the human mind to understand another human being. Why only humans? Every being in Nature displays this capability...may it be the vegetation or the animal world. That is why, there are birds that take flight on seeing a human being, and there are those who will play around in his presence...free from fear. The same is the case with other animals and trees. There are trees that are afraid of man, while a certain plant may bloom up if a likeable person is around. There must be awareness in some corner of every mind regarding the person in whose presence one feels secure.

Perhaps, I could sense that I was completely secure in Ravindrabab's presence, since I had come to recognize and be touched by his achievements, purity of his mind, his maturity of thought, sincerity in action, and his unique way of looking at life. As a result, a complete change came about not only in my thinking, activity, view of life but even in my attire. I adopted the *kurta-pajama*. A cloth bag *(jhola shabnam)* began to adorn my shoulder. ..and in it, if not in my hand, a book found a definite and regular place. Even today, whenever, I leave the house, I always carry a book along. In Ravindrabab, I found the inspiration to buy, and to read, all the books of Vivekananda.

The car had reached Udupi. It must be eight - thirty in the morning. Ravindrabab was lying quietly on the rear seat, his eyes still shut... In between, he would open his eyes suddenly and enquire, 'Girish, have we reached Udupi yet?'

We had not eaten anything since morning, having decided to have breakfast at Udupi. Girish drives at a slow pace. And, we were in no hurry. But perhaps, Ravindrabab was famished...

One thing I have noticed in his case: he cannot bear hunger at all. If the usual time of breakfast or lunch is skipped, he becomes uneasy…starts wiggling like a child.. and even gets irritated…

He must have certainly undertaken fasts during his revolutionary/movement years. While speaking of Gandhiji, the issue of fasting has often been discussed. Fasting was the greatest weapon used by Gandhiji. The very news that he would be going on fast was enough to shake not only his supporters but even make the politicians and his opponents tremble in their boots. Gandhiji never misused this weapon nor allowed others to do so. Today, any Tom, Dick and Harry launch on a hunger strike on some petty pretext or another. This has always irked Ravindrabab. 'These people have made this weapon blunt; they have destroyed its original objective' he says in irritation.

Ravindrabab makes it a point to mention, every time the topic gets raised, how Gandhiji gave a definite dignity to the weapon of fasting and showed how effective and strong it was in comparison with any other (mode of resistance). With this, he also mentions, how fond Gandhiji was of food.

Gandhiji considered food divine. His intake of food was not merely satiating the stomach, it was a kind of worship. He would swallow every bite carefully after having peacefully masticated and chewed it properly. Food is the nourishing essence of the body. He believed that the peaceful in-take of food was a form of worship. He ate with this very feeling and faith.

I have witnessed the same kind of faith in Ravindrabab's eating. No body had ever told me that food should be eaten thus. Nor had I experienced it. During my childhood, *Aai* (my

mother) would say sometimes, 'one should not speak while eating. If you bite and chew well, the food will be properly absorbed'. But I would gobble food and rush to school, trying to avoid getting late. Back from school, feeling famished, I would again eat like a hog. Later, as a participant in the 'movement', there was very little time given to eating. When I used to eat with Bakibab, at his Porvorim residence, I used to be astonished to see how carefully he would eat neatly wiping clean every bone of fish.

My visit to Ravindrabab's at Priol would be especially to have food. Even to this day, I go in the morning, have lunch peacefully and then return home. I saw a 'complete meal' only there. If you visit any one else, there is always a special preparation made for the guest. But not at Ravindrabab's house. It is always the usual food...the regular meal. There is no special preparation, and yet, it makes one content.

I would generally visit Ravindrabab at Priol around eleven to eleven thirty in the morning. Either because of students agitation or some movement or the other, being able to eat a decent, tummy-full of a meal was rare in those days. Sometimes I would get back home after eight or ten days. My lunch at such times was *bhaji-pav* (bread and sabji). Often, I would survive on the mirchi-bread available near the National theatre in Panaji. Although I seldom had food at an eatery, it was beyond my means and the food did not agree with me. Therefore, being able to have a proper meal at somebody's house and moreover, being able to relish it freely was akin to a unique festivity for me.

That is why, I would visit Ravindrabab whenever I found time...and...concealing my real motive...sit chatting with him until noon ...and around twelve or twelve-thirty pretend that I had to leave.

'Okay, Ravindrabab. I'll take my leave...'

'Without staying for lunch? Won't it be a sin for us?'

I would remain silent.

Then he would add, 'Any guest or visitor who comes around noon is like God. The first obligation of a householder is to send him back duly satisfied. The burp of contentment of a visitor is like his blessing. Only then can we claim virtue. If you leave without having lunch at this hour of noon, we will be committing a sin to let you go.'

So saying Ravindrabab would look at the clock. Exactly at one o'clock he would start fidgeting uneasily....calling out,

'Godu, is the food ready?

'Ravindra, come in for lunch, will you?'

Godubai would call out from inside. Then Ravindrabab would get up and swiftly move to the dining room. I would follow suit.

Having washed our hands, we would sit at the table. He would always have me seated to his right. Presently, Godubai would come from the kitchen with two bowls of soup in her hands. She would place one in front of Ravindrabab, and the other before me. Just as we finished having soup, Bai, Ravindrabab's mother would emerge carrying only one plate. She would place it before Ravindrabab. Then she would go inside again and get another plate for me. 'So Dilip, you're fine?', so saying she would go inside yet again and bring a third plate and place it to the left-hand side of Ravindrabab. Godubai would then come and take her place there.

I have noticed that mostly, the guest in the house is served first, followed by the family members of the host. We have the same custom in my house. Perhaps, it is to show respect to the guest. But here, I noticed a different custom. Perhaps it has its

own philosophy, or it may be just a spontaneous tendency.

Self-love is the highest form of love. One who cannot love himself, respect himself, cannot love others or respect them. Ravindrabab was the achiever of that house; he was the head of the family. He has to be respected over the rest. He occupies his place (at the table) and accordingly, others take their own seats. This is the real way of discipline. An institution survives because of this, or else it becomes a mess.

The plate of lunch contains two or three small bowls. One contains *hooman* (fish-curry), the second, *sabji* or *tonak* (a spicy preparation) , and the third, curds. By their side, two chapatis or *phulke* (soft rotis). Besides them fried fish.

As the chapatis are almost consumed, either Bai Ravindrabab's mother or the maid in the house, would come and ask whether I would like another helping. Ravindrabab's quantity is fixed. Hot rice is served after chapattis are eaten. Some of it to be eaten with *hooman*, and some with *solkadhi*. Then pick up the bowl of curds. After that get up and wash hands. By then, bananas are brought to the table. That is a regular feature. Besides there are other fruits. Having finished the fruit, we return to the verandah. Godubai alone stays back.

Once on the verandah, Ravindrabab brings the cigarette pack and holds it in front of me, placing a cigarette in his own mouth. Strikes a matchstick, first lighting mine, then his own cigarette.

For the last thirty years I have been a witness to this sequence. The only change that has occurred is that now there is no Bai. In her place is Godubai, and in Godubai's place there is Rohini—Girish's wife.

Ravindrabab's house has always appeared to me like an *ashram*. Constructing a house on a solitary hillock in Priol is certainly the task of one with a foresight. There is no possibility

of any other house being built there...no chance of noise or disturbance. That house is like a little fort. Ravindrabab's father Dr. Rajaram Kelekar had constructed it. Its architecture is such that there is proper ventilation... breeze has a free play across the house. At the centre of the house is the *Raajangan*'(an inner courtyard open to sky surrounded by the house on all sides). There is a neat arrangement of chairs for sitting in the verandah. The chairs? They must be about fifty years old. The colour of the walls is also the same. The shade with which it had been originally painted. It shows the cultural richness, legacy of the house.

A hall inside is full of cupboards. All are book-cases stuffed with books and only books... in various languages...on different subjects...One lifetime will not suffice, should someone decide to read them all...even if one plans to read night and day...Such is this ideal house...worthy of being the residence of a refined person...worthy of being visited by cultured people...to which one feels like returning ...again and again..!

'Girish aren't we getting there, yet?'

Ravindrabab must be really famished.

'Here we are, Tato. I'll look out for a decent restaurant, okay...?'

Once at Udupi's crossroads, Girish stopped the car in front of a relatively 'posh' local restaurant. We entered. The man sitting at the counter got up on seeing us. He seemed to be the owner. Most people here Konkanis. The hotel-owners in particular are some Kamaths or Shanbhags. Since, he was a Konkani-speaker there was no difficulty of language in communication.

He approached us courteously and having us seated at one of the tables, took our order and went away. He sat at the counter once again, but went on looking at us, constantly turning his head in our direction. Since he was constantly observing us, my attention was also diverted to him. Ravindrabab had his back to him. I was not surprised by the fact that he stared at us. It was certain though that he did not know us. But my very appearance is such that anyone would stare on. Earlier I would feel a little self-conscious, somewhat nervous, if people stared at me thus. But now, I had got used to this: some feel that I am a scientist; others that I am an artist; to yet others, I am someone else altogether. Should I squat along the roadside to beg, I would look like a beggar too…! It is difficult to hide me in a crowd.

Having ordered for *masala dosa, idli-vada* and so on, we were relishing the fare, and eating to our fill. There was no telling when and where would be our lunch. It all depended on how Girish drove the car! It was likely that we would reach Margao by one o'clock in the afternoon. In fact, we had told Nanu (Madhavi Sardesai, Ravindrabab's niece) so. Accordingly, she was to wait for us with lunch prepared and ready. So now, if the breakfast was a bit heavy, there was no problem.

We were still eating heartily, and the owner continued to observe us from the counter. Presently, he held out a newspaper from the counter to one of his waiters, and muttered something incomprehensible in Kannada. At this, he too began to look in our direction with admiration writ large on his face. I could not comprehend what was going on! Finally, unable to contain himself any longer, the owner came to our table. He had brought the newspaper along. Holding it in front of me, he asked, 'Sir, you are Dilip, aren't you?' I nodded. He showed us the photograph published on the first page of the newspaper. A big news item regarding the previous day's felicitation function along with a photograph was published there.

Since, I was prominently visible in the photograph, the poor chap had probably thought that I was the main dignitary felicitated. But the real 'man of the moment' was Ravindrabab. He was the proverbial 'Ganesha', and I was the mouse. But in the photograph, it was the mouse that drew greater attention.

I had a strange feeling. Had Ravindrabab not been there with me, I would have basked in this glory, accepting their admiration quietly.

Presently, I introduced Ravindrabab to that admirer, explaining what the award bestowed on us was about and told him that Ravindrabab was the greater personality of us two. Ravindrabab was listening to my talking with a mild smile playing on his lips. Seeing that naughty smile, along with a child-like innocence, on his face, it was difficult to fathom what he was thinking.

Watching with admiration the Ravindrabab in the newspaper and the Ravindrabab having breakfast in his hotel, the owner returned to his counter with the paper. By now we had become some sort of unique specimen for all the waiters in the restaurant. We continued eating as though we were some V.V.I.P.s—at least I did! There is no denying that on such occasions, my chest swells with pride.

'Dilip, don't you go overboard with excitement...after all this...he is certainly going to charge us for this stuff...and remember ...he won't offer discount of a naya paisa...'

Ravindrabab commented mischievously as he sipped his tea.

It is human nature to watch with admiration, if some celebrity should pass by us, or come to one's door. But appreciation does not necessarily mean going over the top. Even I knew this. It was certainly a matter of pride for them that the persons who have been felicitated in their region, and whose photograph

has appeared in the papers, should be having breakfast in their restaurant. But they were not so dumb and impractical so as to charge us no money for being their guests.

But I had not been looking at them with *that* thought in my mind. This Udupi area is a part of the Konkani-speaking region. The locals generally have their family-deities in Goa. Most of them bear the surnames such as Pai, Kamath, Shanbhag and the like. For them Konkani means GSB (Guad Saraswat Brahmin). One who is not a GSB is not Konkani (in their reckoning)—such is their strange equation. Thus we as Konkani should be GSB and therefore their own. It was this sort of their commitment to Konkani that I was observing. I wanted to see whether they know Ravindrabab as a Konkani leader. If not, I wanted to introduce him to them, asking them whether they are even aware of what a great personality has been sitting in this hotel of theirs!

But Ravindrabab has never promoted himself. He always stayed in the rear going on doing work, while others made a name for themselves. He never took the credit for his own work, nor have I ever heard him utter even a word of displeasure at how others had taken the credit for themselves. Perhaps, I have come across one of the strangest of elemental combination in him.

Any time, when the topic of discussion veered to Bakibab, Ravindrabab would say—'Bakibab never hated anyone. Never called any person bad. Even in his absence.' Must be true. Ravindrabab will never praise anyone without basis. But I too, have never heard even Ravindrabab speak ill of another. Sometimes, he would poke fun at the Marathi protagonists. But the intent was plain humour. I never saw him cursing them, giving them bad words, or making disgraceful, lowly comments.

But the Marathi supporters did not maintain any level of decency. They criticized Ravindrabab from a very low level. Leaving hardly anything objectionable unsaid.

When I recollect some of those comments, I feel furious. Had this happened in any other State of India, I fear to think what the followers of a leader like Ravindrabab, would have done to his detractors pouring out venom against him.

But here in Goa, the Konkani supporters silently bore it without a word (of retaliation). None opened a verbal attack, nor wrote so much as a line against them. Of all, Ravindrabab was the one with the greatest degree of equanimity. He never ventured to respond making out as though it was all said about God knows who! There are several leaders in the Konkani movement. Right from the time of the Opinion Poll up to now, through their speeches and articles they have figuratively thrashed the Marathi protagonists and the pro- merger protagonists black and blue, tearing them to shreds. But not a single Marathi protagonist nor a merger supporter has seriously attacked them in return. But should Ravindrabab say even a word against them, the Marathi protagonists would be piqued, and then like the bees in a bestirred honeycomb attack Ravindrabab furiously. These included the Marathi protagonists of all age-groups. The Marathi dailies would spend column after column with articles of protest. Just because, such articles got publicity, even a green horn, hardly able to spell 'Ravindra' correctly, would scribble an article—probably the first and the last in his life.

Once, Ravindrabab light heartedly said, TADA should be clamped on these pro-Marathi chaps. It was a simple statement. It did not mean much. He had made it as per the sarcastic strain in his nature. Any one else would have ignored it; but not the pro-Marathi supporters. They were insane with rage. For a month or so, they just went berserk. Young and old, wise or otherwise.... They all created a ruckus...trying to turn the world topsy-turvy...making out as though at Ravindrabab's behest, TADA is actually going to be invoked against them. What was the real reason behind all this hue and cry?

TADA was an Act meant to be invoked against those in-

dulging in anti-national activities and committing treason. The Marathi protagonists, after all, were fighting for their 'legitimate' demand for 'Marathi as the State language'. The prime strategy in their battle against Konkani, was to look down upon Konkani. As though, it was their right and obligation to do so. Then why should TADA be clamped on them? It was neither feasible nor possible. They should have therefore laughed it off...without paying any attention to Ravindrabab's statement, shown that it was insignificant and futile. Despite all this, why did the Marathi protagonists take it up so seriously?

Only for one reason: Ravindrabab might have said it to scoff at, or to ridicule them; yet, the fact of the matter was, what the pro-Marathi supporters were doing against the interests of Konkani at that time was indeed anti-national; and, TADA was meant for the anti-national elements.

When Konkani had not yet been recognized as an independent language by the Sahitya Akademi (national Academy of Letters), the foolish propaganda of the pro-Marathi faction against Konkani that it is not a language in its own right, that it is just a dialect of Marathi and so on, could be (in fact, it had to be) tolerated. But now Sahitya Akademi had resolved that Konkani was indeed an independent language. And Sahitya Akademi is not just any literary circle. It is the highest tribunal of national languages and literatures. It comprised the linguistic experts from all the languages. Eighty scholars across the country had given the verdict in the favour of Konkani with hardly one or two Marathi representatives opposing it. When the vast majority of the eighty members of this august body decide in favour of Konkani as an independent language, and yet when these pro-Marathi fellows persist on calling it a dialect, do they not become anti-national?

Goa Government recognized Konkani as language and conferred the status of the State Language on it. Yet, these people insist on calling is a dialect. Is this not treason against the State? Be that as it may! The Government of India recognized Konkani's

status as an independent language by duly including it in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, yet these chaps continue to brow beat Konkani as a dialect. So, does it not imply that they speak against the Constitution of the country? Isn't the act of opposing the decision of the country, and speaking against the Constitution, an anti-national act?

The pro-Marathi faction knew the implications of Ravindrabab's statement, that is why, they felt so affronted and attacked him ferociously.

If Ravindrabab had been like any ordinary Konkani leader, then they would not have been so deeply stung by this comment, nor reacted with such bitterness. Although it was a made in humour, Ravindrabab's statement was essentially true. It was the statement of a contemplative mind...of a sage, whose every word and phrase had a certain weight. The reason for this forcefulness is Ravindrabab's life-long strife and meditation. . .His has not been just a superficial endeavour.

Ravindrabab has not been just any othar person who runs his household properly, makes enough money, and then in spare time becomes a 'leader'. Giving up all these desirable things in life, he walked on towards the wealth of ideals. . .without bothering about profit and loss. He has spent his entire life in earning knowledge and sharing it with others. He did not stop by merely resolving to work for Goa's liberation, for the development of Konkani language and its due status, for creating literary embellishments for Konkani and the like—he did it and fulfilled his resolve. He strove to do away with Konkani's paucity through all the means within his capacity.

He has enriched not only his own language but also Marathi. He has also embellished Hindi literature with his contribution. On the occasion of Gandhi Centenary Year, there was the task of selecting a scholar in Hindi to write an authentic biography of Mahatma Gandhi. And, keeping aside great scholars in

Hindi, this great work was handed over to a non-Hindi person-Ravindrabab. This biography penned by him, is included in the syllabi of Universities in the Hindi –speaking States. As of now, over 3-4 million copies of this *magnum opus* are sold out. Year after year, new editions of this work are printed. But what should all this mean to those unfortunate linguistic paupers, who scorn their own language and vie with one another to metaphorically carry the palanquin of another language shoulder high? They only know on thing. Every word uttered by *rishi*-like individuals, albeit mockingly, has its own impact…it comes true. That is why these pro-Marathi fellows get provoked. This shows the potential strength of Ravindrabab's statements.

The individual, who lives by the truth, speaks the truth…bears a certain power in his utterances. It carries its own brilliance. The speech of a person who never speaks a falsehood, but only utters the truth, evolves to certain potency.

It is said that the *rishi*-s in ancient time used to utter a curse! It seems their curses came true. Then the one who was cursed would plead for the curse to be lifted, so sure he would be that it would come true. After all, how can the words of the *rishi* who never mouths a lie, be any thing but true? Our myths are replete with the narratives of such curse having come true. But then what is a curse, or a bane? Just the word of a man who abides by the side of Truth…with the unwavering belief that Truth has to triumph…!

It may seem an exaggeration, in the present times, to compare Ravindrabab with a *rishi*. But the path which Ravindrabab has consciously adopted bears not even the scent of falsehood. If he wanted to go with falsehood, he could have accepted the path of the pleasurable, the likeable. But he adopted the creditable, the desirable, the worthwhile, and all his life, remained true to that path. He always held on to the side of truth and that truth always triumphed.

Ravindrabab has been ever loyal to the truth. He knows Gujarati. Had he served the Gujarati language (as he has served Konkani) the Gujarati people would have carried him shoulder high in appreciation. He has not studied Marathi in a formal way. Yet, the quantum of his Marathi writing is perhaps greater that the entire reading of any of those fighting for Marathi in Goa. And what kind of writing in Marathi has he penned? Not the kind that merely spills into columns, but which even the opponents should read and absorb.

For the last twenty years or so, Ravindrabab has been writing a column *Swagat,* for the local Marathi daily *Navprabha.* Through this column, he has consistently provided an intellectual input to the Goan society. Some, who have found those articles objectionable, have criticized them. But those who have remained unbiased, and have tried to glean just the inherent ideas, have admired the column to no end. There is a sizeable readership, that misses it if this column is not published in a given week.

His travelogue *'Japan Jasa Disla'* is in Marathi. Another of his works, *Dnyanneedhichya Saniddhyant* based on his regular conversations with Kakasaheb Kalelkar while he accompanied him as his scribe, holds its own distinct place in Marathi literature. It has been translated into Gujarati and in other languages. Readers have welcomed these works. Even his opponents would agree on this: had Ravindrabab written only in Marathi, then his literary output would have certainly weighed favourably against the quality-work of intellectual ilk presently available from a handful of writers in Marathi. Among those not embroiled in linguistic antagonism, and who look upon literature only as literature, from Kakasaheb Kalelkar to even our contemporaries like Manguesh Padgaokar, Bhalchandra Nemade and Narayan Surve –they all accept this. But the Goan Protagonists for Marathi lack that largesse of heart, because being caught in the blind web of polemics, they have moved away from rationale.

The pro-Marathi faction has always kicked up a furor over Ravindrabab's writing in Marathi. They have screamed from the rooftops —'Look, although he is a promoter of Konkani, he writes in Marathi.' He has to express his thoughts in Marathi because no one reads Konkani.

This is a fact. Although the language of Goans is Konkani, although they speak Konkani day in and day out, the ghost of Marathi haunts them yet! There was no other option before him except to write in Marathi in order to guide to sanity, those who cannot speak Marathi, who do not properly understand the Marathi they read, yet erroneously believing Marathi to be their language, they hate Konkani. Whether it is the good or ill fortune of Goa, the Marathi newspapers run in Goa. Not because people want them, but because industrialists want to play politics. These traditionally running newspapers go on because Goans have got used to reading them. They have never been given an option, and these papers never awakened the self-respect of their readership. Had someone done so and then provided them an option today the situation in Goa would have been different. But businessmen and politicians never provide an alternative. In the absence of such an option, there was no alternative but to write in Marathi to awaken these dormant Goans. At this point, getting the ideas across to people was more important. The daily *Rashtramat* could win the Opinion Poll only through the medium of Marathi. In spite of all this, on many an occasion Ravindrabab has decided that he would not write a word in Marathi any more, and on as many occasions he has relented.

Suppose Ravindrabab had stuck to his resolve and stopped writing in Marathi, who would have been the loser? Certainly not Ravindrabab! He would continue to write in Konkani. Those trapped in the 'tradition of reading Marathi' would remain so entrapped. Some might have read Konkani per chance. But for those who always remained enveloped in their own web, buried ostrich-like under their own misconcep-

tions believing them to be the truth, would there have been a change in their thinking? The loss would have been of such folk. Those who had turned away from truth would have always remained divorced from it.

In spite of all this, to this day when some still try to turn away from reality and believe that Marathi is their monopoly, then a righteous person cannot help feeling indignant at their approach. It is often said in some quarters, 'Let them fall into a pit. It is their foolhardy, after all.' But it is not right to leave them to their madness; a social activist and a reformer cannot afford to do so.

Marathi is nobody's monopoly. Certainly not of the Marathi protagonists in Goa. It is the language of all those who serve it. Even the likes of Ravindrabab have considered it their own. There are several cupboards full of Marathi literature in his house. There are persons from Maharashtra who visit him, and he speaks to them in Marathi only. But when injustice is done to his own language, and some other language tries to take its legitimate place, then securing the position of one's own language, is the prime obligation of every individual proud of his own language. Fulfilling that obligation does not entail any injustice to another language, it does not mean hating the other language. Ravindrabab believes in this principle. That is why, even as he says, he will no longer write in Marathi, he continues to do so. The true and proud lover of a language acts thus. But one needs a certain capacity to understand this fact. How can we look for it among those few Goans who have given up their self-respect altogether?

Ravindrabab has never said a word against such persons, although they continued to spill their venom of ignorance. On the contrary, he has patiently waited for their return to the fold, believing that 'they have erred; they are our own people... the calf that has gone astray will finally come home to its own fold.

We had moved on far away from Udupi. After breakfast, there was a certain feeling of heaviness...we had not slept too well during the previous night...moreover, there was the cool breeze....Ravindrabab was dozing in his seat. On the front seat, Girish had Tobu for company...the young lad was chattering away...I had no role in that intimate talk between father and son...Head pushed back over the seat-rest, I was looking out of the window.

Along this highway...somewhere ...lies the Jog fall. Had Girish so intended, we could have taken a detour. I have been there twice or thrice. Now, to revist it in Ravindrabab's company would be a unique experience of joy.

When I developed a liking for reading, I had no idea that travel is undertaken and after the journey a description of the travel experience is written and even published. In fact, those who taught literature in school had never made us aware of such a thing. As a result, my early reading had remained confined to novels and short stories. But when I came across Ravindra Kelekar's collection of essays, *Uzvadache Soor* (Melody of Light) some of the essays in it, namely, "Gharapuri ," "In Belloor Matth , "Varanasi , "Nature's Epic—Jog" helped develop in me the taste for reading travel-writing. A good piece of travel-writing can also inspire the reader to travel. Moreover, as one is engrossed in reading, one often imagines that he himself is undertaking the travel.

Before *Uzvadache Soor* came my way, I had not read a single travelogue. Not only that, apart from the annual school picnics held within the State, I had never travelled outside Goa. However...for the record...I remember...being taken to Amboli

(a picnic spot just across the border of Goa) on a school excursion. But even then, I had gone there just for the sake of going...because...we were 'taken' for the picnic...Teachers would take us along , but would not provide us with that special eye to see what one should on a journey. Perhaps it was not our age too, to realize that there is something like a traveler's eye. Such a feeling dawned in me when I first read *Uzvadache Soor.* And then...the mad craving that I developed for travel continues unabated to this day. I have no idea, how many readers liked *Uzvadache Soor,* and to what extent! But, as for me ...the book added a distinct melody to my life.

In 1978, I had covered the entire Southern India. Why undertake travel, how to see a place during a journey and the 'eye' for so doing —I found all this in Ravindrabab's book. It will not be an exaggeration to claim that *Uzvadache Soor* laid the foundation of the journey of my life ahead.

Belloor Matth had become a fixture in my heart. Until 1980, I had not visited it. Only read about it in *Uzvadache Soor.* But I had felt as though I had actually been there in person. When I was on my way to Sikkim and I had to make a two-day halt at Kolkata, I set out directly for the Belloor Math...almost as though the *matth* (monastery) was beckoning to me.

It all happened thus... I received an invitation to visit Sikkim. In those days, I was unaware that there was something known as railway reservation. I was under the impression that booking a berth must be a luxury meant for the affluent. I went to the Vasco (Marmugao) station and directly purchased a ticket to Siligudi and began my journey in a general compartment. What I experienced in this course of this journey, until I reached Howra station in Kolkata, was simply unbearable! Perhaps...this was the reaction of a first time traveler to such a long distance—since a 'susegado' Goan has different expectations of a journey—that I found this journey so full of hardships...?

For that matter, I had undertaken a journey to Pune in 1977. That was also because of Ravindrabab. He has been running a magazine, *Jaag*. It used to be published from Pune in those days. Sumant Kelekar (Ravindraba's cousin, close associate and the publisher of *Jaag* until his recent demise) would get the work done by going to Pune. On one occasion, Ravindrabab requested me to take proofs or some matter for publication to Pune. I had by then become his admirer (a devotee in fact!)…moreover, …here was an opportunity to go to Pune at no cost to me,… and further…I was getting to do something for Ravindrabab…! For me, it was a deadly combination! I set out for Pune… hanging around near the door of the packed bogie…despite the inconvenience there was some thrill in it….and the journey was short…of a few hours duration.

But the journey to Howra without reservation and the mental distress that I experienced then …was something that could cause disgust for fellow-humans. When I got down at Howra, the railway police picked me up and extorted a 'bribe'. In this commotion, I had missed my train to Siligude, and so I had to halt at Howra. In stead of staying on with those people, the only way of pacifying my agitated mind was to visit the one spot that could calm me down —Belloor!

When I went there, I had not felt the need to ask anyone for directions or suggestion. The book read by me four years ago, was fresh in my mind…I felt as though Ravindrabab was holding me by the hand and taking me on a guided tour of Belloor Matth. Such is the impact of travel writing.

Ravindrabab's term for all the writings in *Uzvadache Soor* is 'writing of self-revelation'. Such auto-narratives —or personal essays, as they are sometimes called—have a salient quality: they reveal the author; in fact, he cannot be dissociated from them. Likewise, even the reader does not remain a stranger for long. He mingles with that narrating 'I' and blends with him. So much so, he begins to think that he himself has experienced the

venture and written its account…and thus… he enjoys such writing.

Around 1976, I had begun reading the book, *Uzvadache Soor*, which was published in December 1973. The essays in it, had all been published earlier in some magazine or the other. As such, though published in 1976, they were written nearly a decade earlier, around 1963. I must have been around 6 years of age then. But I read the book when I was twenty. This is the age of building oneself up...of shaping oneself into something. The essays in *Uzvadache Soor*, captivated me fully at this sensitive age. Each of them was a guide directing my life …leading me on. I would read the book, fully engrossed with it, carefully savouring and storing every little detail, and accordingly, try and give a certain direction to my life. In a way… I was experimenting with the help of this book…!

I had not gauged this fact then. But when this realization came to me, I picked up *Uzvadache Soor* again. Then I noticed how this work had influenced me, and then I also understood the significance of what Ravindrabab has said in his essay "In Belloor Matth…": "At the impressionable tender age, the books of Vivekananda came my way. They urged me to try and understand the sublime idealism of India. This writing took me to Pondicherry…to Sevagram…"

At that time, I might not have understood the essence of what Ravindrabab was saying. But what ensued was exactly in tune with the spirit of his statement. Ravindrabab's books came my way at an impressionable age— and although, I cannot make a cent per cent claim that they have 'formed' me –they have certainly lent a significant hand during my formative years. Today, a certain perspective on life which I have developed, has been the outcome of my having read his books then. It will be no exaggeration to maintain that the difference between what is *shreya* (that which is worthy, creditable, desirable) and what is *preya* (that which is pleasing, likeable) was revealed to me only

through his writings, and I was thereby inspired to give up the path of the *preyas*.

The essays in *Uzvadache Soor,* penned in 1963 by Ravindrabab, were read by me almost after 23 years in 1976. The capability, inherent to such writing, of inspiring a youngster like me even after twenty three years, and helping to guide the path of his life, established the presence of eternal values in it. Who knows? The generation after me may also read these essays and be likewise influenced. After all, *Uzvadache Soor* are the 'notes of luminescence'… they comprise the melody of light…can they afford to strike a 'note of darkness'?

Girish was driving the car and chatting with Tobu- both of them engrossed in a world of their own. There was no way of knowing whether Ravindrabab, with his head pushed back over the seat, was sleeping or thinking of something. I cannot sleep during a journey—especially during the day. At night… it is a different matter. But in the course of a day-journey, I neither shut my eyes nor browse through a book.

With eyes wide open, I looked at the villages and hamlets that rushed past, along both the sides of the road. Were these villages speeding backwards or was the road ferrying us towards Goa at a gallop?

Earlier in the morning, as we were getting into the car after breakfast at the Udipi restaurant, I had asked Ravindrabab, 'These people here…are Konkanis. You must have organized literary conferences and meets to bring about the unification of the people of this region. Although bringing them together politically, may not be possible, still you must have striven to integrate them culturally, haven't you?'

'Not much …really. Others like Chandrakant Keni have been involved in that kind of a work. But much work in that direction has been done by the Swamis (the religious heads of Mutths)…not so much by the Konkani leadership!'

'Why do you say so? Every two years, you people have been organizing a conference or a meet in some part or the other of this region—be it Kochi, Bangalore, Mangalore, Udupi…And with that as the basis, you have also sought to integrate the populace of this region, by creating an awareness among them about the Konkani language and society. In fact, I well remember having attended such events at venues …right up to Kochi.'

'That does not have much significance. In a way, these chaps are quite happy in their own region. As such, they are not too concerned about Konkani…since they are not hindered or disadvantages in any way in its absence. They have completely mingled with the local culture. Their love for Konkani also is not a matter of life and death—as it is to us. For them working for Konkani implies working for the community. Konkani is dear to them, because they can come together as a community on that pretext. Really speaking…it is a get-together.'

'So, that means that should not be counted in the Konkani movement?'

'They'll do precious little on their own. They would actually want anything that we can bring to them. Leave aside the people from Kochi, Bangalore, Mangalore…they have retained their contact and bond with Goa only because of Konkani language and their family deities that are in Goa. Else, they are –all of them- totally absorbed into the local culture of the given state. But I am really, disappointed by the people of Karwar, Supa, Halyal, Sirsi and so on. This entire region is adjacent to Goa. Politically, it may belong to Karnataka. But culturally, we are all one entity. Those people are neither Marathis nor Konkanis. Yet, not a soul among them comes forward to say that they would

like to merge with Goa....none wants to insist that they no longer wish to prolong the present state of free fall. They keep looking to us...hoping that we would do something. Really speaking, shouldn't these people make a common cause and put forth the demand...?'

'If their future can be secured with Goa, then why should we Goans not demand for a Vishal (Greater) Gomantak, with this region attached to Goa?'

I felt that, Ravindrabab was a wee bit irritated by my question. Perhaps, he did not like it or may be he felt that it was silly.

'We Goans cannot make such a demand. And it is not at all proper for us to make it. We have fought against expansionism. Now, if we put forth such a demand, there will be little difference between those whom we have been condemning as expansionists and ourselves. Until, this demand does not emerge from the people concerned, we should just sit quietly...'

I have known Ravindrabab to be always concerned about this region. Not only now...I have noted it even in his writing much earlier.

I was reading his essay "Saimachem Mhakavya: Jog" (The Epic of Nature: Jog) from *Uzvadache Soor.* Even when I had gone through it for the first time, I had sensed his feelings about this region. However, I had not gauged the intensity of those feelings. I had merely gone through it as a travelogue. In fact, I had neither visited this region, now seen the waterfall known as the Jog Fall. I had felt, though, that some day, I should see it.

Subsequently, I had an opportunity to go there. For two days at a stretch, I closely experienced, this 'Nature's Epic' from close quarters—above, below...from the base...! The essay certainly helped do this...yet, the political social dimension of that essay, had skipped me. Now, when we were to visit Mangalore, and since Ravindrabab would be with me, and since

I like to know his view of the place I visit in his company—I read the travelogue yet again! And that revealed his concern with this region and its people; which meant that Ravindrabab had been thinking about these people and their future nearly forty years ago and–he was still preoccupied about them to this day…!

In "Nature's epic -Jog", Ravindrabab says, 'Karwar is very much like Goa'. He does not stop at this mention. He is worried. When will all this Konkani region unify? Perhaps, integrating it politically may be difficult at this point in time. But what is the difficulty in culturally bonding this area with Goa? Wonder as to what the Konkani community here thinks of itself—Marathi or Kannada? Does it have at least the realization that it is Konkani? If not, who shall bring about this awareness in them...and when…?

Today, after forty years, Ravindrabab's concern has not diminished. For all I know, even at this very moment, he may be dwelling on this matter. Who else should worry about this, if not someone like him? People of my generation, if at all, should put their shoulder to this wheel…! Because none else would like to give a dime for this issue. I, for one, feel this matter should be taken up. But whether I possess the capability to lead the vanguard is the moot question…!

My eyes were tired of continually watching the surroundings pass by but there was no one with whom I could chat. Girish and Tobu had hit it off well. I had no business to intervene. So I shut my eyes and pushing my head over the head-rest remained lying quietly…but the thoughts wouldn't cease.

Really, one who befriends Ravindrabab gets into a fix…like me. But how can I aver thus? He has crossed seventy-five. In this long voyage of his life so many individuals must have

come in contact with him. It is indeed likely that his writings, thinking, behavior and life have influenced several others just as I have been influenced. Why just 'likely'? It certainly has. Yet, have any of these people ever complained that they have got into a fix? Have they ever cribbed about it? Then, why should only I be bothered by such thoughts?

Thanks to Ravindrabab's influence, an individual who comes in contact with him, no longer remains ordinary. He is never likely to be so left. He is bound to become an achiever. Even if he does not conquer the world, he will nonetheless achieve something out of the ordinary.

But what is achievement? Taking a cue from his thinking, trying to do something, shaping oneself, creating literature—is this achievement? Many people have different notions of achievement: 'to be well educated, take up a good job, or choose a profession of one's liking, write a little as a hobby, read some and live happily'.

Is achievement, then, only making one's existence secure in the society, or is it being so compelled by someone's thinking as to throw oneself wholly into the furthering of that cause? Is achievement throwing oneself fully into the work started by someone, excepting another's ideology and being committed to it?

There was a time when many youngsters had given up their normal life in order to follow into the footsteps of social reformers and leaders who had influenced them. It may be the freedom struggle, social awareness campaign, or any other work of national welfare! Those who followed their chosen leaders into it, never looked back. They did not give a second thought to their family life which would be ruined; they did not nurse an ambition of building a career. It may be a leader like Subhash Chandra Bose, Gandhiji, JP (Jayaprakash Narayan) or anyone else. He whose thinking touched these ordinary mortals, they followed him to the end...contributing to his work as per their

mite. Some preferred to enlist in Subhashbabu's army, others to serve with Bapu, yet others became overwhelmed with JP's call for 'complete revolution'. None of them ever worried that they would be lost or could get into trouble. They followed their leaders' diktats. There was no anxiety, no complaint.

That age was such and so was the atmosphere. No one considered such 'mad chaps' as insane. On the other hand, everyone found such decisions extraordinary, and society respected such dedicated souls.

But the age in which we are born is different; its environment is different. The ideology that Ravindrabab has adopted is derived from the thinking of stalwarts such as Mahatma Gandhi, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, JP, and such others. Considering Ravindrabab's age, I do not find anything unnatural in this. But comparing my age with his, I find it strange that I should be initiated into his thinking! Had someone of the generation immediately following him had done it, it was understandable. But here, I am representing the third or the fourth generation after him. Moreover, the environment in which I function is also different. It is not conducive for initiation into the *shreyas* 'worthy' or the 'desirable', but rather into one which intices towards the *preyas* (the likeable).

For many, being student means getting into students' agitation and after taking credit for it, show off as a leader. Take political support to benefit oneself. If possible, hitch on to some political godfather, move on holding his finger. Making oneself secure in every possible way. Almost all my companions do precisely that. If someone has secured his place as a leader of Youth Congress, someone else has done so through another party. So how is it that when the criteria of social service, leadership, idealism are so glaringly distinct, here I am following a Gandhian! Is this not some kind of an urge for beggarliness that I am trying to emulate him, trying to understand how he moves about, thinks, what he wears, what he reads and so on? But then, is it really an

urge for self destruction or is it the stroke of Fate that has brought me in contact with him because I am destined to carry on his work?

I had had no contact with Konkani. I was a youngster who had passed the matriculation examination through Marathi medium. My education was in Marathi, reading was Marathi, my being was nursed by Marathi. Had there been no Marathi, I would not have been shaped into a human being worth mention. The language that has shaped the individual in me, taught him to think, provided him education—there is no alternative to that language for me. My elder brother also worked for Marathi. I have grown as a person by studying at the school he has started. With such a backdrop, there is no reason why I should join to the Konkani 'herd'.

Person like Madhav Gadkari (Editor of local daily *'Gomantak'* in those days) appreciate my writing in Marathi. These handful chaps who go on chanting 'Konkani', 'Konkani', are never going to realize their dream (Konkani).

Marathi has so many great figures. Goa would have been merged into Maharashtra. These 'Konkani' chaps would have been trounced. But the Christians stayed together (on the side of anti-merger) that is why merger issue failed. But wasn't our Bandodkar (first Chief Minister of Goa) re-elected? What if the rose (symbol of merger) faded? We now have our lion (symbol of Maharashtravadi Gomantak Party). He will finish off the hand (symbol of Congress) at one go. These pro-Konkani fellows are simply pushing their act too far.

My thoughts were definite. Yet, why do these people speak against Konkani? The language we speak is Konkani, and one we study and read is Marathi. If that is 'our' language, then what is that which we speak at home? A language? Or something else? If as these people (pro-Konkani) say, the spoken language alone is our language, then why this compulsion of Marathi (as our's)?

This must be understood.

The very idea that this has to be understood put me into a tizzy! I approached those who were being ridiculed as Konkanivadi's (pro-Konkanis) and there I came in contact with Ravindra Kelekar.

When did I first meet Ravindra Kelekar? Yes, it was in 1975. It is possible that I had heard his name before. But until there is acquaintance or some pleasant interaction, it is hard to remember a person.

After all, I was a pro-Marathi person to begin with. My stand had not had any intellectual basis. I had just come to the city for college education, having finished my schooling in a village. There was a certain enthusiasm in me. But I had not reached a level of intellectual growth, so as to devote myself to any issue of this kind. I was 18. And... due to a mad reading of fiction, a 'hero' dwelt in my imagination.

My family did not have much awareness about social commitment and the like. But my elder brother had been in touch with the 'rose flower' (pro-merger) and with persons such as Madhav Gadkari, Gopalrao Mayeker among others. It was almost spontaneous that I should side with those with whom my own people were aligned. Moreover, my schooling had been done in Marathi. So being pulled towards Marathi, getting to know only 'those people' was natural. Since, at that time, I felt that the pro-Konkani people, 'two leaves' (anti-merger symbol) sympathizers were our enemies, their names even if mentioned within my hearing range were not important for me.

Later, I got introduced to the Konkani activists; they spoke the same language as I and considering it as 'their' language fought in its favour; this was something convincing. As though to bolster this inclination, someone had given me the book *Konkani Bhashechem Zait* ('The Triumph of Konkani Language') by

Shenoi Goembab. Having read it and found the arguments acceptable, I began to look upon these (pro-Konkani) people as my own. It was in such a state of affairs, that I went to Institute Menezes Braganza in Panaji.

It was May 18, 1975.

There were not many people gathered there. But those who were present appeared to move about with a certain sense of confidence. From my childhood, I have always been fascinated with the idea of seeing, meeting great personages. In school, we used to be taught the poetry of Ba. Bha. (B.B.)Borkar. I knew that he was a Goan, and that, he was known as 'Bakibab Borkar' among the Goans. But I have not had any opportunity of meeting him. Moreover, I was a bit shy by nature. Although I longed to meet celebrities, to talk to them, I had no guts to approach them to get introduced. I felt a respectful distance.

In the literary meet, I saw several pro-Konkani personalities. I had heard their names earlier. But hitherto, they had been subjects of ridicule for me, because Konkani had been made to be seen as a matter of fun and ridicule: 'when it is not a language, these handful of persons have been insisting that it is a full-fledged language. Their so-called language has no grammar, no script'— such were the statements that had been constantly falling on my ears. Since, I had studied Marathi, for me it appeared to be a savior of sorts. When there is such a rich, prosperous language to call our own, it gave us immense pleasure to poke fun at those who worked against it or claimed that it was not their language. All those who were my companions or those with whom I had been acquainted and formed a group of friends were from Marathi medium schools. They were also essentially shaped on Marathi ethos. So ours was a classic case of 'birds of a feather, flock together.' Naturally, pro-Konkani people and the Konkani movement were subjects of mockary for us, and not aware of their status, capability, we would make fun of them.

Until I reached Institute Menezes Braganza, my opinion of the pro-Konkani activists was such. But at that literary meet, from among that brigade of Konkani supporters, when I was introduced to Ravindrabab, I was ashamed of the prejudice that I had nursed against these people.

I do not remember whether the Meet had concluded, or whether some of these people had come out of the hall in the course of the proceedings. But four or five persons were standing at the entrance to the hall. Among them there was one individual in white *kurta-pajama*, with a *shabman* bag dangling from his shoulder. He must have been around fifty.

Those whom I had seen in white *kurta-pajama* earlier, were *ghati*-s (a term used rather disparagingly for persons from the ghats, but also for outsiders generally). We had a school master by name of Danni; he too wore a *kurta-pajama*. But his clothes were in a state akin to that of neglected orphans. Due to the stains on it, it appeared white by contrast. I did not have a very good opinion of people wearing such clothes.

But this individual's entire personality as also the clothes worn by him, totally changed my perception of this type of attire. I was aware that the material was 'khadi'. During my childhood, I had seen a certain Ompraprasad Tyagi from Delhi, who would be wearing a dhoti with a fully white kurta of this kind. It had suited him too.

'This is Ravindra Kelekar'. Someone introduced me to Ravindrabab. With a shy deference, I extended my hand. Realizing that I was among the very people, whom I had ridiculed, I was feeling somewhat guilty... awkward...

'Dilip Borkar? From where are you then?'

Ravindrabab asked with a smile. His style of standing, the smile on his face, its distinctness, its special quality hit me instantly. His manner of looking, of asking questions was different

from that of the rest. It was not a mere formality. It was an affectionate enquiry.

'I am from Agassaim. Doing college…'

'So…do you write anything?'

I had not expected this question. None had put it to me before. The questions asked by others had been of a different kind.

'Borkar? From where? What's your father doing? Where does he work?' Such were their queries. But now I realized that this very first query about writing implied that it was valuable in their reckoning.

'Not much really. A few poems…'

I said with embarrassment. My throat felt dry.

'Keep coming like this…Let's meet again.'

So saying, Ravindrabab resumed talking to the others present there.

I had nothing more to say. So what was I going to achieve by just standing in front of him? To speak, to discuss, one needed matter…some topic…! But here was I meeting Ravindrabab for the first time ever. The friend who had introduced me to him, had said that he was a writer, a leader and so on. But I had no inkling whatsoever, of why the Konkani movement was being organized; nor had I any idea of the kind of books written by Ravindrabab.

On such a backdrop, I would have been crazy to keep standing there. But one thing was certain! I realize it even now: I was completely overwhelmed by his personality. The reason…I did not realize then. But those who have overlapping qualities, those who can naturally get along, are instantly drawn towards

each other. Not only around every object, but even around each individual there is certain magnetic halo, which refracts the object concerned or the qualities, character of the person in question. It is this force that draws like-minded people towards one another.

Or else, when we meet a person whom we have never met before, why are we either repelled and never want to see him again, or are irresistibly drawn to him and want to meet and get to know him?

Time had planned our future relationship and that first rendezvous turned out to be the ‘meeting point’ of our future journey together.

I had no idea where Ravindrabab, who had left with the words, ‘keep coming..let’s meet’, lived or what he did for a living. I also did not know, where we should meet, or why. Gradually, I forgot about Ravindra Kelekar.

But I would meet the ‘Konkaniwadis’. I wanted to understand the Konkani movement. Or was it that, I had no other parallel activity than college education, and so joined these chaps only to fill in my free time? I do not clearly recollect it now. But someone had brought me into this herd and I had stuck on.

I felt that this herd was mine. I found nothing unnatural, or superficial in their talking or behavior. Yet, I would have been ashamed had someone termed me as a ‘Konkaniwadi’.

Nonetheless, I wanted to find out a few things. Gradually, I began to like reading Konkani. Initially, I had difficulties in reading. Being educated in Marathi and influenced by Marathi (pronunciation and tone) I would read Konkani ‘in Marathi’; and would smile at my own style. But slowly, I learnt to read well, all by myself. One day I realized that I had to simply ‘read as I spoke’; and that there was no difference between the two. And lo! I felt that this was most easy…almost home-grown…!

The 'Konkaniwadis' would always have some programme or the other chalked out. On Sundays or holidays, there would be a day-long camp in some village or the other. The 'Konkaniwadis' from across Goa would assemble at these camps like the proverbial 'lost cattle' to be found at 'the Karambolim lake'. Some one or the other would also invite me. The temptation of seeing a new village, free lunch, and above all, the feeling that I too an 'involved in something—revolutionary', made me attend these camps. After all, I too wanted to be the part of some activity, some programme.

During one such camp, I saw Ravindra Kelekar once again.

Identical *kurta-pajama*. A cloth bag slung over the shoulder and a book in hand. I was shy...self-conscious. But still trying to push ahead.

'You're Dilip Borkar, aren't you?'

Ravindrabab asked me over tea prior to the commencement of the camp. That means he remembered me by name. It was no surprise, that I should remember his name; but for him to recollect the name of a nobody was a pleasant surprise indeed. After all he was a leader, a writer. Yet, he remembers me the second time he meets me...!

This one incident was enough to bond me with him affectionately.

My age at that time was such, it was as though waiting for somebody ...I was at such a juncture, where I needed someone to show me the way ahead. A man lost in a dense forest with the temptation to proceed in every direction, will surely seek guidance with tremendous faith from the first person he meets. He will proceed along the way he shows without the slightest doubt or anxiety. But suppose, that wayfarer who guides him is ill-intended...then? What if the path he points out is the one that will ruin the path-seeker's future? His very venturing forward

would be pointless.

No doubt, I was waiting. But I also nursed such doubts about whom I would ask for guidance or about those who would volunteer to guide my way. Although, I did not know in which direction to proceed, I had a faint idea of whither I wished to arrive.

There were many who wanted to be my guides. But I doubted them...so there was no point in following the way shown by them, ridden as I was with doubts. Perhaps the path indicated by them would have led to my good...but it was doubtful, how far I would be able to walk in the company of the devil of doubt.

Everyone looks to another to secure his own safety. It may be any one —an innocent, new-born babe, or a strong youngster capable of turning the world around, or even an old, experienced man feebly counting the last days of his dependent existence—he will think twice of his own security before entrusting himself to care of another. That is why, before he entrusts his own burden to the other, he wants to ensure that the bearer is sturdy; but likewise, the bearer also should create a sense of faith in the one who wants to entrust himself to his care. When such a thing happens mutually, both of them bond with each other.

Every individual, at any age he may be, is important in his own reckoning. He has a natural arrogance of his own greatness. In the meeting of two persons, if this arrogance has an upper hand, then neither can trust the other; and both of them destroy a relationship that could have been built even before it has come into existence.

A truly great person, is he who is aware of his own greatness, but he moves around in the world by realizing that, 'I am not the one who is important, the man in front of me has also to

be given importance. The humility and the modesty of such individuals, are instrumental in sowing the seed of trust in the minds of those who come in contact with them. If great people act as though, they do not recognize the other, or make out as though the other means nothing in comparison with themselves, then it is not possible to strike a chord.

A person whom I had met a couple of months ago... one who did not need at all to remember my name... for whom that name meant precious little... should remember it and address me by that name —this may superficially seem to be a petty thing. But such things create a deep impact.

This may be a natural thing for Ravindrabab to do, but for me it was a matter that changed my entire world. The feeling of innate trust that there was no harm in going to this person rose in my mind. It was as though an infant fascinated by the first smile of a stranger should jump into his arms without fear. Such was that experience…!

On first meeting him, I had already read *Uzvadache Soor*, to know who is Ravindra Kelekar. After, the present meeting, the intense desire to find his other books and read them, rose in my youthful mind.

Uzvadache Soor was read and re-read by me, and then I was driven by the craze of reading his books one after another. His *Vellevailyo Ghulo* (Shells from the Shore) fell in my hands, rather, I purchased it.

Scholastic books are purchased. Buying other books for reading meant that I had been 'spoilt'—such were those times. One who cannot afford to buy books prescribed for study, one who largely depends on others' books for study, should he buy

books to read meant he had gone 'astray'.

However, notwithstanding this general belief, during my childhood, I had off and on purchased tiny story books costing (in those days) ten paise or twenty-five paise, and had been given a spanking for so doing. But now I was no longer a small boy. Moreover, no one gave me money for study. So there was no question of anybody exercising control over me, or insisting I do such and such a thing. I could at my own expense, do what I wanted.

Vellevailyo Ghulo was written, prior to *Uzvadache Soor,* published in 1971. It cost ten rupees. My lunch would cost one rupee and twenty five paise. Travel from Agasaim to Panaji cost fifty paise. At this time, ten rupees was a huge sum for me. Yet, on 27 August, 1977, I purchased the book. It is my first book, bought at such a high price. That was my age to enjoy myself, to watch movies. In those days, I used to love cinema. The ticket to the movies was fifty paise or so. In these circumstances, spending ten rupees for a book, clearly shows how deep had been Ravindrabab's impact on my life.

After the book was purchased, I had no peace of mind until I finished reading it. With that I developed a craze for diary-writing. Every significant thing or occurrence in the course of a day has to be written down —this was something I picked up on reading the book. My pen began to move…night after night. In those days, who would give a diary to someone like me? It had to be purchased. But I could not afford the extravagance! So I began by using a note book and after writing the date, I would write my entry for a day. This habit continues to date. This is one good addiction *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* gave me.

Along with this addiction for diary-writing, the existing addiction for reading grew stronger. *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* revealed to me that there was much more left still to be read, that the kind of matter I read in Marathi was not really worth it, that there

were many other writers, who have written several books such as these and these...! I became even more convinced that whatever Ravindrabab writes is like an infallible statement, the very truth; there is nothing beyond it—this thinking became stronger. Yet I would find some things incongruent...unacceptable, but with that I also wondered who I was to decide that they were wrong! The feeling that whatever Ravindra Kelekar writes is the truth germinated in my mind.

In Vellevoilyo *Ghulo,* Ravindrabab has portrayed a few incidents using just the minimum words or sentences. Were these the experiences he had gone through, or was this the empire of words created by this demigod of literature to present the readers with a distinct literary genre or mode? The possibility cannot be ruled out. There is no doubt, that this is a distinct form of condensed writing which expresses universal truths in a precise words, which provokes introspection and deep thinking, and which encourages a quest into the very meaning of life. These brief writings are capable of taking a reader like me to an unusual height. But at the same time, as Ravindrabab himself admits, it is a diary. Thus, Ravindrabab is present in these writings as also his thinking, behaviour, nature, and tendency and so on. So while one believes that this diary is the essence of his make, a stray phrase or reference from it sends someone like me crashing from heavenly heights to the hard earth.

A person like me, really speaking, has no right to say that he believes in the caste system or does not do so. The reason, as I see it, is that my caste is not the decisive one. The caste which has ruled over other caste for centuries together, has exercised authority over other castes under the misconception that it is the superior caste, those belonging to such a caste alone have the right to claim that I do not believe in the caste system, that all castes are equal; and such a claim has meaning too.

By heavenly grace, the question of the caste was never

raised in my house. My parents were illiterate. But they never strove to tell us what was our religion, or caste, and what was that of the others. Since people of all faiths and castes were welcome to our house, we never realized that such questions had, or had to be given, any significance.

During my childhood, just as I had Hindu, Christian and Muslim playmates, there were boys belonging to all the castes of Hindu religion too. The Christian boys called every one else *'chedyaa'* (boy/son), their parents also called them as well as their companions 'chedyaa'. No one felt anything was amiss. Among the Hindus everyone other than the Brahmins would call their children *'chedo-chedum'* (boy-girl). At that age, everyone was a chedo or a chedum in our reckoning. But when some one among us would call a Brahmin boy as *'chedo'*, his parents would curse and say, 'how is it that you are calling him a *chedo*? Is he from *bhailee jaat* (outside caste implicitly non-Brahmin caste)? Call him *chalo*, do you hear? *Chalo*.'

At an age when we had no inkling whatsoever of what was a caste or a religion, such a furious response of the family of one of our own playmates merely to the term 'chedo' had left a deep scar on a sensitive mind like mine. *Chedo* is from *'bhailee jaat'*, *chalo* is from *'bhitarlee jaat'* (inner caste implicitly, Brahmin)...were cultural influences that came our way when we didn't understand the very significance of these words!

Having arrived like a wayfarer from such cultural influences, when I read *Vellevoilyo Ghulo*, just as I was able to raise myself to an unusual height and to bow in reverence at Ravindrabab's grandeur, my mind halts obstructed by a sentence: *'Hanvem amchea chedyak –Vasantak- vicharlem, tannem taaka pakollyo mhuntaat mhunn sanglem'* (I asked our *chedo*-Vasant- he told me, they call it *pakollyo*).Ravindrabab picks me up at one go and casts me out of the *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* in that erstwhile domain, where existed Brahmins who lost their

temper simply because their son was called a 'chedo'. I was just about enjoying heavenly bliss in the company of *Vellevoilyo Ghulo*, and had Ravindrabab promptly cast me into hell? To hear the curses?

I know, why only 'know'? I am hundred percent certain, when Ravindrabab wrote this, re-read it while editing, he must have found nothing objectionable in the sentence: *'Hanvem amchea chedyak –Vasantak- vicharlem... '* This is so because for the last several centuries these terms have been heard in our daily speech. Everyone uses them as a matter of convention, and Ravindrabab employed the same term by sheer habit of usage without any negative feeling. Those who read it, also did not find anything wrong. But what about the 'Mahabharata' that had taken place due to this word in my childhood? Should I not place Ravindrabab among 'those' 'Brahmins?

If this book had belonged to a different genre of literature, that usage would not have affected me as much. But when Ravindrabab expresses himself through the diary-form, and I find this term, imagine how hard it should hit me.

This was in 1970. Perhaps in those days, he did not feel strongly about paying attention to this sentence or the word. But 20-25 years later, he used the word *'kalavont'* (temple danseuse; colloquially used to denote a social group in the past), and when an educated youth from that social group objected to the usage, Ravindrabab had to apologize for it. Why?

It may be the word 'chedo' or the word 'kalvont', they have been a part of the traditional usage, even among the educated. Those who are social activists, who do not believe in caste-system, will call their own son or daughter as 'chalo' or 'chali', but will call the maid-servant as 'chedum' (feminine of 'chedo'). In like vein, I have been witness when a youngster from Kshatriya Brahmin Samaj, who unnecessarily pokes fun or

teases others, was irritably asked why he was laughing like a 'kalavont'. We all use that expression on occasions, but no one takes such incidents seriously, nor makes an issue of it.

But an issue is made of whatever Ravindrabab writes, because, his words are like an indelible line drawn on a marble slate. His every word has its own strength, its own capacity, and it is natural that the reaction to his statements should come with the same kind of forcefulness. This only happens in the case of one who writes of worthy, credible matters, in the case of those who write the likeable or the pleasurable, not only their words but their entire writing is left alone to scatter away into the thin air of oblivion.

The one who writes of the worthwhile and the creditable, does not have deference for others. It is only written with the thought of how it will be for the welfare of others. The likeable writing thinks of its sale prospects, covets popularity. It keeps an eye on the actual sale.

Ravindrabab's writing is like a 'dose of bitter medicine'. He himself admits it. A true physician's job is not to prescribe tasty or likeable medicine, but rather that which is worthwhile and will be for the patient's good. It may not always taste good, or sweet but it will certainly be effective.

Vellevoilyo Ghulo is not only Ravindrabab's diary or diurnal record. It is an anthology of sorts. This world may seem small to us but it is not really so. Many great people have lived in this world. They have thought deeply over life, contemplated on its nature; they have narrated their own experiences for the future generations. There have been several writers of this kind and there are still many more in the different parts of the world. Writing in their own languages, they have generated literature. Moreover, there is a variety of countries, peoples, their attires, cultures. One lifetime will not suffice for someone like me to get to know of all this, or to read of it all, or even to travel to all these

places. Even to just know that 'all this' exists will not be possible for me to achieve in a lifetime. Then how to decide what is to be seen, what to read or whom to recognize?

At such junctures, a book like *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* comes to our rescue. Stories and novels may entertain one; they may also acquaint us with the social or temporal reality. But what should one read, whose views should we try and understand — such guidance is provided by the reading of *shreyas* or worthy literature.

It is only through the book, *Vellevoilyo Ghulo*, that I got introduced to Acharya Kriplani, Maulana Azad, Lohiya, Pyarelalji, Sudhir Ghosh, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Raja RamMohan Roy. Besides, thanks to this book, I learnt of innumerable writers of repute such as Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Albert Moravia, and so on, who have lived in this world and may still be a part of it.

I was introduced to Sharatbabu's Kamala and Bharati, became friends with Tolstoy's Natasha and I was inspired to read all that literature.

I developed a fondness for all kinds of saint poetry from getting to know Namdev, Kabir, and Tukaram. The book, *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* created in my mind the feeling that I have to read a lot, see a lot and also that I can achieve a lot. This book taught me to look at the world with a clear mind and unbiased thoughts—not by wearing the blinkers of tradition.

At that time, I was stepping out of the teens. At that age ideas such as: ' sex that is the result of the union of two hearts is "moral". It may well be extra-marital', could come my way only because, someone like Ravindrabab was bold enough to say to those like me that the traditional education we had received was faulty, and that the social vision given to us was wrong. That is

why we could develop a different perspective on life. That is why, persons like me, at least I myself, could think independently, and could aspire to find 'the meaning of life'.

All this could happen only because, *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* came my way at the right juncture.

Yet one question keeps pestering me...it almost persecutes me...!

Vellevoilyo Ghulo contains almost everything. It is like a vast storehouse of knowledge. It is doubtful whether, even the hundredth part of the information it yielded me, would have come my way, had I spent a lifetime to gather it on my own. Yet, why did only the term 'chedo-Vasant' remain stuck in my memory? Why did only the word 'kalavont' provoke that advocate Bandodkar who objected to the usage?

Was all the rest that is contained in this storehouse of knowledge of no value... of no consequence? Or is there some inadequacy in our own thinking? Why did we not realize Ravindrabab's diligent efforts in garnering all this wealth for our benefit? Or is it that we wasted our own efforts only to deliberate on whether he used those terms consciously or inadvertently?

The honeybee collects honey, builds a honeycomb, by moving far and near from flower to flower. We get this honey ready-made. We enjoy it greatly. But we never forget that the honeybee has a sting. Whose fault is this?

I know it well that Ravindrabab has spontaneously used those words in the course of his writing. That someone called Bandodkar also knows it. Whatever that has continued to run on into the society as a part of a tradition (however ugly), will continue to exist (as a residue). Those who are the intellectuals or the social reformers should try to eradicate it. They should

cast it away. But at times, one is not at all conscious of such a thing, and it comes up quite spontaneously. This same thing must have happened with Ravindrabab too. Suppose, this usage had not come up, or after having used it realizing that it would be harmful, had he consciously erased it, would we –I, myself or these others- have treated him thus? Is it wise to have a thought and then consciously keep it aside? Doesn't the free expression of the unselfconscious, spontaneous usage of what does exist in society –but should not be– indicative of that author's purity of mind?

Ravindrabab's book, Sarjakachi *Aanterkatha* was published in 2000. Being a creative writer, the varied experiences on his path of creativity, the inner reality behind them, the chemistry of thought- process in the composition of some of the essays in that book—the shadow of all this must have hung thick on his life; that must be why he called it as *Sarjakachi Aanterkatha* (The Inner Story of a Creative Writer). He himself has guaranteed the authenticity –as though signing a stamp paper—to every word in this book by calling its contents 'the visions encountered in the service of creativity, the truths gauged'. Moreover, while narrating the 'Aanterkatha' (Innerstory) of *Sarjakachi Aanterkatha*, he has maintained that, 'I have not held literature as an activity for entertainment, but rather as a life-building activity'.

In *Sarjakachi Aanterkatha*, there are 36 essays on different subjects. The book could have been named after the title of any of the other essays. But since the book is about how important is creativity to the writer, how should be the life of an author, what kind of *sadhana* is necessary for life and in the course of his own *sadhana* whom he came across, how they affected him, what he felt about them—all these ideas, thoughts and opinions, being a part of this book, the title *Sarjakachi Aanterkatha* is no doubt apt.

Yet, the essay titled 'Sahityachya Malalveli Shindallkee' (The Prostitution in Literary Circle), from this book which spoke of the 'the visions encountered in the service of creativity, the truths gauged', created a furor by the usage of just on word 'kalavont'. Those who had been lying in ambush to attack Ravindrabab Kelekar, got hold of easy ammunition. How was the word 'kalavont' used at all? There was the demand that he should apologize to the particular social group. Had anybody else written such a thing, no one would have noticed, perhaps none would have bothered to do anything. But Ravindrabab's *Sarjakachi Aanterkatha* was not another ordinary author's 'inner story'; it was that of Ravindra Kelekar, a creative writer class apart, whose usage of every word, every reference had a distinct context, an unusual force. None could afford to ignore the ideas expressed therein. Since I had gauged Ravindrabab's inner mind, I knew there was nothing objectionable in that usage. Nonetheless, the question that could not be suppressed was, why did this happen?

'Sahityachya Malalveli Shindallkee' published in this book, was not a new article. It had been published in the editorial 'Nadar Sampadpyachee' (Gaze of the Editor) in ***Jaag*** ,1993 in the April issue. There Ravindrabab had not used the word 'kalavont'; instead he has used *'gannikaa'*. How, then, was this word replaced by 'kalavont' when the book was published?

Ravindrabab has been consistently maintaining that when any book of his is due for publication, he edits the earlier articles and only then clears them for the press. Perhaps, when he must have edited this essay, he might have felt that the word 'gannikaa' does not fit plush in the context of Goa! Since this word is one of those which are in circulation in the societal life for cursing others when angry , is it likely that Ravindrabab felt at the time of editing that he should express his anger with an appropriate degree of harshness by using this particular word?

I am not in the least prepared to buy the argument that Ravindrabab could have used this word just to ridicule any caste or to show its people down. Although a certain caste has also stuck on to him, he accepts that it cannot be denied much as one would want to do so. Having admitted this, it is indeed most unlikely that he could ever say or do something to scorn or despise other castes. Some may feel otherwise about this. But then their approach to other people's thoughts, is as per their own intellectual capacity and approach.

My mind goes back to an incident. Ravindrabab's niece, Savita Sardesai decided to marry Subodh Kerkar. This was the first time, a daughter of the Sardesai-Kelekar clans was stepping out of the caste boundary to marry into a family belonging to another caste. It was natural that there should be some differences of opinion within the people of their caste. This issue was not particularly important either to the family of Ravindrabab or of Savita; nor did they believe in such ideas. Yet it was a matter of concern to their social group, their caste and their larger families. Such a revolutionary idea could not be digested so easily by them. With the caste, there is also the viewpoint of the society at large. A competent girl from a respective social group should marry an eligible young man from that very social group—such is the thinking of society. Her entering into another social group is seen , after all, as a kind of social loss. At this juncture, I asked Ravindrabab, what his view was in this case.

Looking at me, Ravindrabab smiled to himself, ' I have never been opposed to this marriage. Others in my family had been. When they sought my opinion, I told them strightaway "our Savita ia a golden girl. We should entrust her to a goldsmith.".'

How apt are his words! That reply, the choice of his words deserve to be praised. If we should look out for casteism in those words, then gold will turn to dust. But unfortunately, we

do not want gold; we are more fond of dust. To rub it on our forehead like *bhasma*(holy ash) and create a political controversy in the name of caste and religion!

When I was dwelling on this matter, I placed the thought uppermost in my mind before Ravindrabab. What reply, he would give was not important. But the one tinge of grouse I bore against him would have been erased away.

I was not going to be deprived of his company midway; I had plans to walk down the avenue of life in his company. This would not be possible even with the slightest grudge borne against him by me.

'In *Vellevoilyo Ghulo* why did you term Vasant as *chedo*? Why is he not a *chalo*? Is he a *chedo* because he is from a lower caste?'

Ravindrabab went on staring at me. He probably had no idea that I would ask him such a question; or perhaps he had no ill intent regarding the usage in any way.

'The difference implied by words such as chedo, chalo had never existed in my reckoning. I also had no intent to use a given term to indicate the distinction in caste –context. I have none even at this moment. But I will say one thing to make the matter clear to you.'

My whole attention was focused on his words.

'I am not such a wealthy person as to afford a servant in my house. Whatever the work which had to be done about the house, including digging up the garden, I would do it myself. I feel like doing so even now. But since I have gotten used to wielding the pen, the hand has lost touch, as it were, with the spade or a pick-axe. My physical strength has also left me. In such a situation, we brought a boy named Vasant to come and live with us. The fact of the matter was that he had lost his father

and his mother could not afford to raise him. So with the intention of getting some help for ourselves but also to help him with money for education and other expenditure, we had agreed to have him with us purely on humanitarian grounds. Now the question is should he be called chedo or chalo! When we were discussing the linguistic (usage)matters, we had arrived at a broad understanding that there was no harm in terming a household help as 'chedo', but others –irrespective of their castes- should be termed only as 'chalo, chali' and referred to as such. This (usage in the book) may be the result of that, or else do we not call those who come to help with the domestic work as 'wavradi or wavrado'? I could have used the same term.'

Ravindrabab justified his usage.

'And what of 'kalavont'? Why not 'gannikaa?'

'My original article was in Marathi. Hence the word 'gannikaa' had appeared in it. Later the same was translated into Konkani.'

'Would it have mattered if the word 'gannikaa' had been retained in the Konkani translation?'

Ravindrabab became somewhat pensive with my query.

'I did not wish to tell you this. I am only the author. There is also a publisher besides, who publishes my work. He too at times edits the matter. The errors which remain in a book, after it is published are not of anyone but of both the individuals. As such they cause problem for both. So I felt, that I should apologize and end this controversy at that. Sometimes, some questions do not have answers.'

Ravindrabab opened out his mind to me.

My head was aching with too much thinking. Unknowingly, swinging it hard, I shook it.

'Dilip, are you dozing off...?'

Ravindrabab asked me. Perhaps, he had woken up from slumber. Or perhaps, the shaking of my head, swung in my trance of thought, must have brushed his shoulder and awakened him up.

'Tato, you nicely enjoy a nice nap, and then ask him whether he's dozing off?.'

Tobu said to Ravindrabab and turning to Girish resumed their conversation.

'Pappa, how far have we come?'

'Perhaps up to Honnavar... not yet touched Karawar'.

As he drove on, Girish was telling Tobu. I looked out of the car. I also did not realize where we had reached. I had been lying with my eyes shut all this while. Since Girish was at the wheel, there was no need for me to pay attention to the road; and since, there was hardly anything new or interesting en route, there was hardly any curiosity left to look around. Recently, I had been to Mangalore on a couple of occasions, and since I myself had been driving, my eyes would flutter along the sides to see whatever was of interest.

This entire stretch is like a dry desert patch. People are poor, trying to make a living with difficulty. Some places like Honnavar, Kumtha, Karwar, Bhatkal, seem somewhat crowded and busy in comparison, but in the rest of the region all villages look alike. What is so special that one could observe. But I

never miss the stretch of the seaside that lies along the road. The long road along the sea, and the vast sea as far as the eye can see. I like this part of the region the most.

It was in 1978, that I had been charmed by this seashore for the first time. It was my first visit along this road. We had been on our way to the Kochi Conference in a minibus. The majority of passengers in the minibus that I had boarded were from Panaji. They had started on a journey across South India under the pretext of the Conference. Some of them had visited Karwar, or Mangalore or even Manipal earlier; they would praise this region within their capacity, and try to show that they knew intimately every small hemlock along the way. I was listening to their discussion with appreciation. Until we reached Mangalore, I listened to their talking-in other words, their showing off. I feel on hindsight, I was tolerating it all.

Had I remained in their company until Kochi and Kanyakumari, I would have become, with their influence, just one of them. At Mangalore, as a result of one of our Panajiwala leaders shouting at me, I stubbornly I insisted that I would not go on further with the group. It was a lucky that Ravindrabab pacified me saying 'Dilip, don't act silly,' and invited me to join him in the other minibus. It was as though he had saved me from a great mishap.

'Girish, shall we halt for a cup of tea?'

Ravindrabab suggested. I want to say the same thing to Guirish.

He had been driving non-stop from Udupi, where we had had our breakfast. I had no idea whether he was used to driving at a stretch for one and half to two hours.

I was also inclined to stop for a cigarette and a cup of tea... and besides to answer the call of nature. Perhaps, thinking that both of us were sleeping, Girish had not stopped along

the way so as not to wake us up.

Girish is five years my senior. But I am not his friend. I am his father's friend. So, he may be counting me in the age-group of his father perchance!

'Don't think there'll be good hotels hereabouts..will have a stop by some stall and have tea.' Girish said slowing down the car.

We did not want anything to eat ...just a cup of tea... and with that a cigarette...as we stretch our legs a little.

Now it was nearing eleven o'clock. We must have reached in the vicinity of Sirsi or thereabouts. Girish stopped the car at a turn under a tree and parked it along the side. Under another tree was a small hut with a tiny stall containing plastic jars with items such as peanuts, groundnuts, laddoos meant for sale. Besides them hung huge bunches of bananas and tender coconuts in bulk.

Likelihood of getting tea there seemed bleak to me. But surprisingly , tea was available... and so, was steaming hot *moogan bhajee* (sabji made of sprouted green gram).

We alighted from the car. Seeing us a woman who looked to be a Dhangar got down the stall and began to make enquiries in Konkani regarding what we wanted to have.

Girish asked her to make some tea. Ravindrabab was fidgeting around the car...I thought he wanted to sit down somewhere...but he seemed to be looking for something...he wanted to answer the call of nature too!

But there was no place that was a little screened off from view...along that straight highway spread out far and wide...vehicles moving back and forth ceaselessly ...and the tea-stall run by a woman ...in whose presence no immodest

action would do.

Beside the hut though, there were shrubs which ran down the hillside. There was no proper pathway but one could move down holding the plants. I could have managed it…but could not say whether Ravindrabab would be able to manage it.

'Dilip, hold on to Tato's hand, okay? He may slip ...'

Girish cautioned me. I extended my hand to help Ravindrabab to move down away from visible terrain, but he almost brushed off my hand and holding on to the bushes descended downwards, all by himself. I did not follow him...but went the other way and finished my own business.

Sometimes Ravindrabab acts like a stubborn child…thus! I have often experienced it. Otherwise he is very sweet-natured, like a jar of honey! His every word, every laughter is so transparent …so enchanting… worth treasuring for keeps. But all of a sudden, he acts as though in an irritated manner.

Perhaps, when a man discovers that he is growing old and dependent, he must be acting irritably…like this. Does he get irritated because he feels that others should not assist him, that they should leave him on his own and not show compassion, or is it because of his frustration born of the realization that his life has now reached a stage of dependence and help from others—there is no way of knowing this for sure.

I had heard that one should not rush forward to help aged people unless they seek assistance , or else their self-respect is hurt and they get irritated. But presently, I had spontaneously moved on to offer assistance, not because Ravindrabab is getting old and is in need of help from the likes of me… I care for him with an innate affection…as a deference shown to great litterateur!

Mine must be the last of the generations that look upon

authors, artists with respect, wanting to place them on a pedestal and serve them...!There are left but a few individuals like me, who are excited at the very prospect of meeting a great poet, writer, or any other artist, those who would strive to be simply touched by a great personality or be overwhelmed just by seeing them in person. We used to struggle to meet the greats like Bakibab, Shankar Ramani, P.L.Deshpande, Namwar Singh, or any other of their ilk. We can hardly see that sentiment in the present generation. The feeling -that one should adore, or serve the poet or the writer one loves—is altogether missing in the current generation. They seem to care for none! I doubt whether there will be anyone who will look up to us in the same way as we venerated Ravindrabab, Bakibab, Laxmanrao, Manohar Rai and so on! Not that I expect such a thing from them; nonetheless, the generation that presently writes poetry, short story etc. does not seem to be touched by such a sentiment. Wonder why?

During our youth, we were so proud of our writers, poets. One reason for this can be that in those days we had no other option but to read. We had given ourselves up only to reading and worshipped the 'Word'.

Now there is a general fall of interest in reading. Those who read, get the opportunity of meeting the authors on a platter. Those who do not read but are devoted to the world of Cinema, have different ideals. Perhaps, the role models of the present generation may be from filmdom. That may be the reason for this state of affairs.

During 1975-76, young fellows like me were crazy after reading but they were hardly fortunate enough to meet the writers whose works they read. The present generation can see every body (i.e. writers) on the television screen thanks to Doordarshan. Perhaps that has dimmed their enthusiasm to meet the authors in person. During our days, the thing called Doordarshan was not in existence at all.We listened to the voices of our authors on the Radio, and felt contented with that. The

very sight of icons like Bakibab, Ravindrabab set our hearts racing.We would long for an opportunity to speak to them. It is the same even to this day!

In 1977, the Shenoi Goembab Birth Centenary Celebrations began in Goa. I was looking after the office of the Centenary Committee. It meant I had to look after the office all through the year. From the point of view of the Konkani Movement these Centenary celebrations had a lot of significance and value. Since the Sahitya Akademi had granted Konkani the status of an independent language, the Marathiwadi faction in Goa had become furious. They were directing their energies to ensure that the Konkani Movement should not prosper, that it should not be permitted to grow in North Goa, and all Konkani activities be jeopardized to the extent possible.

The pro-Konkanis, on the other hand, had the objective of celebrating the Shenoi Goembab Birth Centenary Celebrations with great fanfare, and thereby to take Konkani to as many people as possible. Considering the opportunity provided by the Centenary, various Konkani leaders would visit the office of the Celebration Committee to plan activities and strategies. Hitherto, the Konkaniwadis had had no official place of meeting to call their own. Now thanks to this office they found it. So people from across Goa would make it a poin to come here. Among them would be the writers, the poets and other prominent individuals from different walks of life. Ravindrabab was a frequent visitor, every other day. He would come, simply pull up a chair and sit down. In that same spotlessly white Khadi attire. Starched. I would be afraid lest I should pass on my dirt to them, if I touched him. My heart would beat excitedly. What should I speak to him? If there would be someone else present in the office, then it would be another thing. But if I were alone, I would be terrified with anxiety. ..not knowing what to say! I would respond to whatever Ravindrabab would ask and sit quietly. Shouldn't there be some topic of which I could speak? Else, what could I find to

say? Moreover, if I say something irrelevant or out of context, it would be so very embarrassing. So, believing that it is the best to say the least than saying anything senseless, I would sit mum without venturing a word.

Ravindrabab's style of sitting was very distinct. He would never occupy a chair kept against the wall; rather, he would pull it parallel towards the table...then gently lift up the rear end his long *kurta*, and ease himself into the chair...crossing his legs over...then he would pull out a packet of cigarettes and a match-box and light the cigarette. I have never seen him light the fag by holding the matchstick between the palms. He would place the cigarette between his lips and light up by drawing the matchstick directly against the matchbox right in front of his face. He would never take care to protect the flame from the breeze. Extinguish the flame and draw on the fag. Shake the matchstick and look out for an ashtray...never throwing it carelessly around.

Then he would open the cloth bag kept on the lap and take out a book. Place one hand on the table and be lost in reading.

Sometimes, he would stand on the verandah waiting for someone who would be expected to come.

Gradually, I too got used to his awesome presence, and I began to muster up courage to speak to him. But I certainly preferred to listen to him intently than have my own say. I would listen to him and store it all carefully in mind...later that same knowledge would come in handy to impress others.

I liked Ravindrabab as a litterateur. But certain people also said that he was a Gandhian. As they would curse Gandhiji, some of them would also curse Ravindrabab for being a Gandhian.Mock at his clothes, his work. I too used to be anti-Gandhi (in those days), because he was (in my reckoning then) responsible for the partition, because he placed his hands on the

shoulders of young girls...!

I had, for that matter, no knowledge about Gandhiji. I had not read Gandhi. All my information about him had been derived by word of mouth . . . from stray individuals. . .mostly those who cursed him. In other words, all those with whom I had come in touch, had been cursing Gandhiji, but I did not mind it. But the same persons, when they ridiculed Ravindrabab as a Gandhian, I would be furious. . .Moreover, most of them were those who had neither read Gandhiji, nor glanced through a single book written by Ravindrabab.

I might not have read Gandhi, but I had certainly read a few books, and articles of Ravindrabab. I could judge from them, how great he was! Yet, I lacked the capacity to defend him. . .and bore it all silently. For me Gandhi was not great, but my Ravindrabab was! Although he was a Gandhian, I did not know Gandhi. Yet, I had eventually changed to the view that since Ravindrabab was a Gandhian, the Gandhian thought must be valid too!

I was trying to read any literature on Gandhiji. But probably due to my prejudice against him, I was still not finding him likeable. I had also not asked Ravindrabab "Why are you a Gandhian?". I had not felt the need to do so, then. When Ravindrabab holds Gandhi in esteem, there was no question of my not accepting him. Eventually, I began to feel bad about the curses and the criticism heaped against Gandhi. But on what basis, could I counter their arguments? Should I not be adequately armed with information, to defeat them ? Whenver I decided to read Gandhiji, I would feel bored . . .sleepy. . . the moment I took up one of his books. Still I would try and stubbornly persist. . .Slowly, I got used to Gandhi. . . . even began to read the books which I had been hitherto reluctant to pick up. Not only this, I visited Vardha and saw the Gandhi Ashram, and the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and clothes kept in Gandhi Kutir. At Vardha, I purchased Gandhiji's works. . .in Hindi. . .since my

command over Hindi was good...and the books also were cheap! I paid a visit to Agakhan palace, when in Pune; when I was in Delhi, I went and offered my respects at the 'samadhi' at Rajghat. All this, without having read Gandhi...only because Ravindrabab venerates him.

I have still not read the Gandhi-writing purchased at Vardha. The books were opened only to be put away again...unread. I would be tempted, I won't deny it, to get to know Gandhi from Ravindrabab, but I lacked the guts to ask him. I would keep on listening attentively, only to the subject on which he spoke ...and saved it in my mind ...for keeps.

So, there was this long wait to understand Gandhi.

In 1993, Madhavi Sardesai rendered Ravindrabab's Hindi book *'Gandhi-Ek Jeevani'* into Konkani as *'Eka Vicharachi Jeevitkatha* (The Lifestory of a Thought). I had not come across Ravindrabab's Hindi original; perhaps, I would have read it, if I had laid my hands on it. It is still doubtful whether I would have understood it. But now, I managed to read this entire translation at two non-stop sittings. I was truly sorry—only because, I had delayed reading about Gandhi for so long. Till... 1993... even after meeting a Gandhian, I had taken 18 long years to get to know Gandhi.

Ravindrabab had written the original *'Gandhi-Ek Jeevani'* (Gandhi—A Biography) in Hindi. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had herself suggested his name for this august task. It seems 37 lakhs (.37 million)copies of the book were sold at that time.Truly, an astounding figure! But how many Goans had read it? How would they? Ravindrabab was a Konkaniwadi..so can they read his book...! Such are these miserable unfortunates....

Some of our fellow Goans have written quite a lot in several foreign as well as other Indian languages. Ravindrabab has also written in Marathi, Gujarati etc. But the very fact that a non-

Hindi speaking writer should be selected to write the 'official' biography of the Father of the Nation, and that book should sell into lakhs of copies is a thing which avers not just Ravindrabab's greatness, but one that brings glory to the whole of Goa.

I said to Ravindrabab, 'You must have received a huge honorarium for this work! Even if you should have got a rupee per every copy sold, then nearly 37 lakhs of rupees should have come your way.' That a writer from Goa can receive such a big sum of money just for a single book, was beyond my imagination.

On listening to me, Ravindrabab smiled…in his distinct Ravindra style.

'I just got rupees five thousand as the honorarium for writing this book.'

'Only?'

'Yes, there was an agreement to that effect, at the very outset…that I should submit the written text and receive five thousand rupees. ..So I submitted it as per the agreement and collected the sum promised. The cost of the book was fifteen rupees. Had I even taken 10% royalty…you can calculate.'

What calculation could I do? I went on gaping at his face.

'Didn't you suggest to them, thus…?'

'No. Sharda Prasad had himself volunteered to raise this matter with Rajiv Gandhi. He was the Information Advisor…But I myself said no…I have not written the book for money and I do not wish to go beyond the agreement.'

Had Ravindrabab consented to the idea, he would have got the royalty. I was aware of 'what' the 'so-called' great writers did by catching hold of the Government Officials. Had he

merely expressed interest in the issue, he would have been a *lakhshadheesh* (a millionaire). But would he have remained the *Shreyarthee* that he is?

Several persons have authored Gandhiji's biographies. Ravindrabab is one of these many. So, what's new? But *'Mahatma Gandhi-Ek Jeevani'* is a book distinct from other such works on Gandhiji. Ravindrabab has himself claimed, 'Had I not had anything new or different to say, then I would not have come forward to write this book. Gandhi has been the subject of my study for the last forty years. On reading this book, if the readers become desirous of getting to know Gandhi more closely, I shall be happy...'

When the author is aware of his own aim in writing such a book, and understands it worth , then the value of the work become palpable to others too.

Although Madhavi Sardesai, his neice has translated Ravindrabab's *'Mahatma Gandhi-Ek Jeevani'* into Konkani, still he is sure to have worked some changes or made suggestions about it. The original Hindi work had a set limit of page numbers. The Konkani rendering did not have any such limit, that is why, as Ravindrabab has already said, some matter has been added on to it. That means a worthwhile book on Gandhian thought has made its appearance in Konkani. This is a book which helps understand Gandhi fully. Had the Gandhi-critics read it, the worst of them would have turned Gandhian. So, there is no wonder, I was greatly influenced on reading this book.

That was followed by the February issue of *Jaag,* 1993. The editorial 'Nadar Sampadpyachi' contained Ravindrabab's response to someone regarding Gandhi...regarding whether he believes in Gandhi or not. Ravindrabab writes in his response to that individual,:

'The person who works in the public domain, should be

true to his word; he should not be insincere, false, treacherous, or exploitative…such a man who works in the public domain – may be as a pancha, sarpancha, school teacher, member of Parliament/ legislative assembly, minister , policeman or in any other capapcity—he should be a person of 'integrity'. All the activities in the public domain should be in accordance with truth; whether at home or in the marketplace everywhere truth alone should hold sway. A person may be educated or illiterate, he should be loyal to truth,clean, so sincere as to be trustworthy. All interrelations among human beings should be in accordance to humaneness; even when conflicts arise between individuals, one should not give up the humane spirit. Everyone should believe that just as I have the right to believe in what I believe, similarly, the other person has the right to believe in what he believes in! One should deal with others respectfully; none should be afraid of stating the truth as he understands it; none should be reluctant to speak the truth however bitter it may be; one should not give up one's humility; nor cheat another; neither thieve nor be insincere; none should make another person his prisoner or slave. A human being should be truthful, courageous, bold, humble and have self-control. No country should rule over another ; all countries should be free. Such were the many beliefs Gandhi held dear…

If you believe in these things, then you are a Gandhian…I believe in them, so I am a Gandhian.'

I received a jolt on reading this. In fact, I had been believing in these principles ever since 1975. So, I had been a Gandhian even then! So, why had I cursed Gandhi? Why did I nurse a doubt about Ravindrabab initially, only because he was a Gandhian?

My head began to reel…

Catching hold of the shrubs, Ravindrabab ascented the slope and returned to the tea-stall.

The woman at the stall, had prepared a good cup of 'special' tea. We sat on a makeshift bench... Tobu and Girish sat a little away! Tobu was now eating the soft kernel of the tender-coconut, having finished drinking its water. Girish had also had tender-coconut water. Tea had been ordered especially for the two of us. We craved for smoking a cigarette. A nice fag, after a hot cup of tea, is sheer bliss...indescribable...!

Girish also smokes...but not in front of his father. I have never seen him do it. If he sees Ravindrabab approach, I have seen him extinguish and throw away a lit cigarette. That is why he probably quenched his thirst on coconut water ... in case tea should tempt him to smoke.

I cast a glance at Girish, he was looking at us as he pulled at the straw, sipping the coconut water, as though saying, 'You chaps are doing fine.'

Girish is Ravindrabab's only child. He was born in 1950. Ravindrabab's entire life's work should have prompted him to write or participate in the 'movement' under its influence. But as far as Ravindrabab's modes of living, thinking and ideology go, Girish has no relation or contact with them. He follows his own mind! He is a successful architect. Happy in his own world. He has no complaint regarding what his father should have done or been!

Ravindrabab also has nothing against him. Unlike others who, despite being writers, hold a certain expectation from their

children....that they should do such and such a thing ... etc...

However, I have been witness to one thing...those who are Konkaniwadis... they have made sacrifices for the sake of Konkani. But I have never seen their children becoming a part of the movement!

Ravindrabab offered his entire life to the Konkani movement. But he never tried to encourage or promote his son into the Konkani movement, leading him by the hand. This duo of father-son is peculiar. The two are poles apart. I doubt whether Girish has read anything written by Ravindrabab. Perhaps he has! I have never tried to find out; and although I know Ravindrabab all these years, I have never asked him about Girish. Perhaps, I did not find it proper, or never felt the need to do so.

Ravindrabab got involved in the Goa Freedom struggle, ventured into the Konkani movement, and became associated with the literary activity -–purely on his own. His father was a reputed doctor of his time, with a well-established practice. So the atmosphere in Ravindrabab's house should have been as in a doctor's house. But Dr. Rajaram Kelekar was not a physician like some of the present day doctors.

Today, the medical field has turned into the greatest instrument of money-making. No longer a realm of service, it has become a commercialized profession. So the atmosphere in a present-day doctor's house is likely to be along similar but expected lines—trying to shape the children into becoming successful doctors to carry on with their profession since the parent is one such successful professional.

Dr. Rajaram Kelekar was a man of the olden times. Goa was then under the Portuguese control, while the rest of the country was ruled by the British. The winds of freedom blew over the countryside and his mind must have been shaped by those currents of thought. Ravindrabab mentions with pride that of the

entire collection of books he has, five-six book-cases belong to his father's collection. He had brought them back from Diu where he had practised as a physician. One may feel that these books may be only on medicine. But it will surprise one to no end to know that these are books of literature in Portuguese, Gujarati and English.

It is almost unimaginable that a physician practising medicine in a remotely distant place like Diu, should while returning to Goa bring back with him seven-eight cupboards full of books. If it is bringing money back home, it is understandable, but the idea of bringing books is something the present generation may laugh at.

Diu is not close to Goa. Moreover, in those days the modes of transport also left much to be desired. It had to be a sea voyage to Goa. During such times, to love books enough to collect them and bring them back home to Goa-not a cupboard-full to two, but enough to fill so many cupboards. This is an indication of the kind of refined upbringing Ravindrabab has had since childhood. So there is no point in laboring under the contention that Dr. Rajaram Kelekar might have expected his son to follow in his own footsteps as a doctor of medicine. When the family atmosphere is culturally refined, the child is never compelled to study a particular course, or to take up a particular profession. That is a feature of the contemporary, materialistic world. Those that think of living, of existence as a mere material interaction, have ditto expectations of their children. Perhaps, they have even borne them with like calculation. In this context, how did Dr. Rajaram Kelekar's son pave a different path? Or why did Girish, Ravindra Kelekar's son not follow into his father's footsteps? Such questions have no relevance!

But one thing must needs be borne in mind here, Time has its own requirements. Accordingly, it decides who should assume what role in life.

Having finished our tea, we sat smoking. Now there was little conversation. When one stays away from home, from Goa, one misses home intensely; one feels utterly homesick. Ravindrabab must be also feeling so, or perhaps he must have been tired out by our long drive homewards...!

If you look at Ravindrabab, he appears to have been more tired, more fagged out as compared to other Konkaniwadis. His other contemporaries of the same age, seem more energetic, more healthy. They might have aged in emotion or intellect, but they look physically hale and hearty. Ravindrabab must be described as still 'young at heart', since he knows how to get along with the youngsters very well. Or else, would the young coming to him long to be in his company as much as possible? He has the capacity to direct the (energies of)younger generation. It will be no exaggeration to maintain that if anyone can provide a proper guidance to the youth, it is Ravindrabab. But his aging physique does not support his enthusiastic mind. I feel, this must be the only ailment of the intellectuals; that must be reason for his present exhaustion too! Or it is likely that he is missing Godubai, thinking of her!

Godubai is Ravindrabab's wife - his other half as it were! A daughter of the Sardesai family, theirs was a love marriage...in 1949. Today, on looking at Ravindrabab, it is hard to believe that he has had love marriage. But Godubai and Ravindrabab have grown up together. Their friendship blossomed into love. It seems, Ravindrabab would frequent Godubai's residence in those days. I have seen a photograph of Ravindrabab, in shorts, with Godubai. I found that funny. But their love experience must have been unusual. Of the Platonic kind! Today, even at this age, they

are not inclined to part from each-other,even for a short duration. This gives us an idea as to how deeply they have been involved with each other.

I had not been inclined to get married right from the start. I was against the very institution of marriage. Ravindrabab knew this. But he would insist that a marriage was essential to human life.

During childhood, with one's parents , siblings for company, one does not feel lonely; during one's youth there are several friends to keep one company.You can spend time with them. This is the age that gives rise to the sexual urge among the young. This urge can no doubt be fulfilled, even without the bond of marriage. But (drawing an analogy) there is a world of difference between home food and the food served in a restaurant. Moreover, there is yet another reason for marriage: the friends who have accompanied you all along, will eventually get married, or move away due to work or business. They are unable to give you the same kind of company as before; and further, they may not like being disturbed often. So they avoid such contacts. That is how, one needs companionship at this stage. Now it may be sought even with a prostitute (or sexual worker). It is need of the human body, and the age is such. But this is not right. Yet the sexual urges have to be given vent to! It is a requirement of the body. ..like so many other requirements...if it is not fulfilled, it can lead to perversity...both physical as well as psychological. A man may seek solace in masturbation...may look at every passing woman with perverse intent. Moreover, if one has no capacity to have intercourse with a woman, he has no right to masturbate. Likewise, (it must be remembered that) money can never buy sexual pleasure. Union of two bodies is truly complete when two minds become one. The body that is purchased for sex with money cannot bond hearts, that only unites the bodies. Such a relationship has no worth at all. It is a sin, on the contrary. Such an immense pleasure in life can never be pur-

chased with money. It is not right even to try to do so! With all this, it is equally important ot bear in mind that, it is not a sin to have intercourse with the woman with whom one's heart had bonded even though she may not be one's rightful wife. This despite the fact that society may not accept this or scoff at it!

The only solution to all these problems is to find a young girl of one's choice, and duly marry her. One's wife is the only woman before whom one is totally naked, fully uncovered—outwardly as well as inwardly. Curiously, while this does not happen in the presence of even one's own mother, it happens with this strange female (who becomes one's wife). She is the true companion of one's last days of life. She is the true friend. To get such a lifelong friend, it is necessary to get married.

Ravindrabab would tell me thus. But I paid little attention to his words then. However, today when I look at Ravindrabab and Godubai I understand the veracity, the truth in his experience.

I have a memory. ..from 1980. ..when Shenoi Goembab centenary celebrations were going on. I was studying in Dhempe college in those days. It was then that my love-story began.The girl was from Panaji. Our crazy love spanned nearly three years, from 1977-80. Then her marriage was planned… perhaps, it was more to curb our relationship…for her family must have feared that it might get out of hands. ..and so they went for a *chat mangnee, pat byaah* (quick engagement, swift wedding).It was a huge heart-break. My first ever love lost! I was on the verge of a collapse. But with whom could I share my grief? If I should speak to my friends, they might tease me, say that they had fore-warned me…!

I went straight to Ravindrabab at Priol. Narrating the entire episode to him, I burst into a fountain of tears . Ravindrabab let me cry to my heart's content. When my outburst of sorrow had subsided, he said quietly, 'true love never breaks away'

Perhaps, you are destined for something very distinct. So you have been misled, so (life has dealt you with) this experience to caution you that you were erring ...you should not grieve over it...This and much more in this vein... at that moment I felt it was beyond my grasp...today I have imbibed it well indeed...!

'Have we reached Sirsi?', I asked Ravindrabab. Our silence was irking me. We had not exchanged a word for so very long. Frankly speaking, there was no need to say much either. ..we only looked forward to reaching Goa... as soon as possible..!

A feeling of freshness had swept over, after our halt en route for tea and cigarette. The drowsiness had evaporated...and an excitement filled the mind at the thought of getting closer and closer to Goa every minute.

'The Jog fall is near-about ...here, isn't it?' I posed yet another query, with the hope that he should suggest to Girish, 'Come, let's go and see it.' But none seemed to pay any attention. What a strong urge to get home, must these chaps have!

'Have you not seen Jog fall?' Ravindrabab had given up his silence.

'Have seen it. After reading your essay "Nature's Epic-Jog", I had the urge to see it. The last time when I had been to Mangalore, I had stopped by to visit the fall.'

'Then why do you wish to see it yet again?'

'It would be a unique treat, a memorable experience, to see it in your company,' I said.

'Not now. We'll do that, at leisure. For that matter, I also

want to visit the Himalaya…let's go together,' so saying, Ravindrabab began to look out of the window. I too dropped the subject.

There is a difference between visiting any object/place merely because it lies en route, and in making a special trip all the way just to see it. Nature entices the mind only when it is free from care. Presently, all of us were anxious to get back home. We had told Madhavi, that we would be reaching by noon. She would be waiting for us for lunch. At this moment, changing our schedule and making a detour to Jog falls from Sirsi , would mean reaching home by dusk. So it was best to erase the idea from the mind altogether! Let us see, if not to 'Jog falls', hope I can make it to the Himalayas with Ravindrabab.

Ravindrabab had travelled to the Himalayas in 1956. The year I was born, he must have been scaling up some peak in the Himalayas. He wrote his travelogue, *Himalayant*, almost after eleven years after his journey across Uttarakhand and the Himalayas. While he was midway through his writing, he had the opportunity to visit Japan. The description of his visit to the Himalaya had to be abandoned halfway. After, returning from his Japan trip, he wrote *Japan Jasa Disla* in Marathi, published in 1970.

I also have a mad craving for travelling. Whenever an opportunity has come my way, I have never let it go by. While in service, I have even given up a job to undertake a journey, when leave was not available. Yea, one may find another job, but a lost opportunity for travel may hardly knock at one's door a second time.

Although, *Japan Jasa Disla* was published in 1970, long before *Himalayant* could be published, I had not been able to lay my hands on it. However, Ravindrabab affectionately gifted me *Himalyant* in 1977—duly autographed. He wrote, 'With the hope that you may be inspired to visit the Himalaya'. For me

his wish was like a command. But how to go to the Himalaya? I read the book, from end to end, at one single sitting.

While I read it, I never had the feeling that I was brawsing through a book of travel. I seemed to me that I was myself undertaking the journey, and seeing the Himalayas with the eyes of Ravindrabab…!

After I finished the book, I felt enriched with the feeling that I had visited Uttarakhand. Now, there was no other go but to travel to the Himalaya. And suddenly—an opportunity to visit the Himalaya presented itself. I saw the whole of Sikkim, went upto Nepal..wandered across Kulu-Manali, Chandrakhan, crossed the Khauli pass, scaled the Rothang pass, discovered the source of river Vyas…

And—while admiring all this, *Himalayant* was in front of my as a guide. As a moved through this Himalayan region, I began to grasp exactly what Ravindrabab was trying to say through his journey, his writing. Everything I saw, every place I visited gave me the feeling of déjà vous…although I had never reached those areas before.What could have been the reason for this? Was it not the impact of Ravindrabab's book, *Himalayant*?

When I returned to Goa, and decided to write a travelogue, I thought I would read *Himalayant* again. Yet I was afraid, lest its style, descriptive mode should influence my own writing. That was quite likely. Moreover, another thing was also likely …after I write down my own observations, they could match some of the descriptions in *Himalayant* . It would be purely a co-incidence. But readers could have found such a resemblance to be an instance of plagiarism. Still, despite such misgivings, I decided on reading the book, once more. Perhaps, that would help me avoid some of the things that could appear to be identical.

When I picked up *Himalayant* for a second reading, I stopped at one sentence. Ravindrabab had written, 'The scenes on the way up to Narendra Nagar were all worth seeing. But I kept feeling that I had seen them before…' I had also had an identical experience. Further, I had the same experience when I had travelled to many other places as well. Wonder, why this feeling emerges…?

My book, *Gomanchal te Himachal*, was completed; the manuscript won the Kala Akademi award even before it was published. After its publication, I gifted a copy to Ravindrabab, requesting him for his opinion. Three editions of this book have been sold. Later, I have also won the Sahitya Akademi award for the same book. Yet, I did not value the views of other readers; I craved the opinion of Ravindrabab, since he had himself travelled across that region…it may be Uttarakhand. Moreover, he had written a travelogue on his visit. Hence his view mattered. One day I went to Ravindrabab and sought his opinion. He said, 'the book is good, but "you" emerge in the book . That should not be'. I courteously shook my head, and remained silent. Yet, I had a question:I have been the traveller, I have been the travel-writer; whatever that has been written has been that which I saw, experienced. Then what is wrong if 'I' emerge in the work? Had I not been seen then it could be said perhaps that something was missing in this work!

What did Ravindrabab want say? Does he mean to say that in 'travel tales' more of 'I' should be seen? Would it look like travel-writing –only then? Read *Himalayant*, you will understand…perhaps something to this effect…?

Be that as may! There is no comparison between *Himalayant* and *Gomanchal te Himachal. Himalayant* has been decorated with the Sahitya Akademi award—the first ever after awards for Konkani writing began to be given away by the Akademi. This was the first book to be so honoured. It was an event that would remain forever etched in the history of not only

Konkani writing , Konkani society, but in the history of the Konkani language itself. While recording the history of the Konkani movement, *Himalayant* must needs find a mention; it is essential. The book *Gomanchal te Himachal* may also find a mention, until another travelogue is written and it wins a Sahitya Akademi award. Yet there is world of difference between *Himalayant* and *Gomanchal te Himachal.* The ster cannot be compared.

The author of *Himalayant* is an experienced intellectual, who has absorbed the essence of life. The author of *Gomanchal te Himachal*, on the other hand, is one who had just learnt to walk... to take a step ahead...as a writer; he had still to absorb a lot of experiences; he was an infant just looking at the world around in amazement.

Himalayant is the revelation of the truth of nature; it is a living poety; metaphorically, it is like the real location of shooting for a film; while *Gomanchal te Himachal* was like the shooting done with erected sets. My writing can in no way be comparable to Ravindrabab's. Whither celestial God Indra's (divine elephant) Airaawat and whither an ordinary mortal Shyambhatt's pony? Such would be the matter of comparison. Yet, as a neutral, indifferent reader one will find that both these works have their own distinct places aesthetically.

Ravindrabab has indeed gifted the Konkani language with a beautiful, captivating piece of travel-writing by capturing the journey through Uttarakhand in *Himalayant.* Others who have travelled across this region have also written of their travel experiences. It is not possible (for me) to enjoy these works to the fullest because of the linguistic limitations ; but being in one's own language, the language of one's spirit, *Himalayant* penetrates the very depths of one's being; and, thereby this spontaneous expression of the poetry of Nature takes the mind of the reader to the realms of rare eccstacy.

Ravindrabab's desire to see the remaining portion of the Himalayas, has remained but a desire! Now, it cannot be fulfilled at all. Had I met him, a little earlier in his youth, then I would have enthused and persuaded him enough to go on a journey of the entire Himalayan range with me. It would have been the very best of company for me, and Konkani literature would have been further enriched with the Himalays. Now, it is impossible for him, and for me too!

What Ravindrabab has said in his *Himalayant* is right indeed:

Duniya ki sair kar gaaphil

Zindagani phir kahaan?

Zindagee gar kuch bachee

To naujawani phir kahaan?

(Go on a voyage of the world, O careless Soul!

Where will you come by life again?

Some life, though, be granted perchance

How will you then youth re-gain?)

I can sense the same thing happening in my own case, and my mind is filled with remorse.

Goans have travelled all over the world—more than most peoples of the world. But it was mostly for self-sustenance. It occurs to this day. Those who move across the world to meet the needs of survival, they merely care for their stomach; not for the world around that they see. As such, despite having the aptitude for writng, one cannot expect them to write of their travels.

There is difference between seeing the world out of a need to survive, and seeing the world for its own sake. Some of those Goans who have travelled abroad and returned home might have written of their travel experiences—may be in Portuguese, English, or in other languages but I never attempted to find such books and read them.

Whenever, any books or articles in Marathi have been available, I have read them. The authors have no doubt done their best within their capapcity. But when I read the Marathi work by Ravindrabab *Japan Jasa Dislaa,* I was really impressed, stunned in fact, by the ease and spontaneity of expression in Marathi displayed by a Goan Konkani writer.

Many writers from Maharashtra, have written on Japan on having visited that country. When the Youth and Sports Directorate of Government of Goa, selected me to visit Japan, I quickly read several of such books . In a way, it was my mistake. A creative writer should not read others' travel descriptions prior to launching on a journey, because that can lead to a peculiar influence on his mind... to his vision being coloured by their view. Such writing then has no significance. If one wants information about locations of places to be visited, it is best to read travel brochures and travel guides. Such locales should not be seen through another person's/traveller's eyes.... Seeing them with your own eyes has a rare appeal.

It is easy to travel. But writing a travelogue is more difficult than writing any other form of literature. Forcing oneself to write of a certain place, just because one has visited it becomes like a photograph taken by sheer intent. It is worthless; it only adds to the trash writng in the given language. I have also gone through such trash, as have I read some of the excellent travel writings.

I came by Ravindrabab's *Japan Jasa Dislaa* pretty late in life. I could not find it even after searching for it. Not only was

a copy unavailable in the libraries in Goa, the librarians there had not even heard the mention of this title. I made enquiries with some booksellers in Mumbai, but copies were exhausted and it was out of print. Finally, I had to surrender to Ravindrabab's generosity. He is one of those who believe that one should never part with one's wife and one's book! Yet what was the problem to give me a book he himself had written? But the funny thing was that he himself had no copy of the book. That meant I was not going to be able to read it! I was very sorry. And then—one day, Ravindrabab went inside the house with the words 'Wait, I'll give you something', and returned with the book *Japan Jasa Dislaa.* It was dusty and looked like a historical document.

He handed it over to me with the caveat 'Read the book, and straightaway, without passing it on to anyone else, return it to me.' It was a priceless gift to me.

I had forgotten that I had asked him for it. But he had remembered my request well, and knowing that I would ask for it some day, had given me the copy on tracing it without fail. This was a golden co-incidence for me.

I quickly read *Japan Jasa Dislaa.* While reading a travelogue or even while travelling, one should never feel tired of the act; on the contrary the feeling that one should see some more places even if one's legs complain should be uppermost in one's mind. Likewise, one should feel like reading some more even if the eyes and mind are tired. With the same kind of interest, I sat through one day and a night and completed reading *Japan jasa dislaa.*

I began to feel as though, I had just travelled to Japan and back. I became familiar with the locale there, met the people. The locations became vividly clear and almost visible before my eyes. Being introduced to their culture a sense of respect and affection for the Japanese people developed. The reason for such an impactful experience was the spontaneity of expression

and the ease in his style of writing.

Travel writing should not be merely a description of the places, but rather a work capable of taking the reader on an imaginative journey to the place of travel as he reads the book.

While one gets to know the place, one should have fun, be introduced to the culture ...and soak in an experience of the various aspects of life such as social, economic, spiritual, aesthetic....like wafting across the sky... mounted on a cloud...!

On our way to Goa... while still in Girish's car... I had gone on a journey to the Himalaya and to Japan in Ravindrabab's company and come back. I have not idea, on what trip Ravindrabab had embarked. Was it perhaps on an anxiety jaunt worrying over what is the future of the Konkani populace here? Or was it regarding, when this Konkani land with the political label of 'Kannada region' would discover its selfhood? Or perhaps he was already at Priol chatting with Godubai and telling her about the felicitation function at Manipal..!

There is an amzing thing about travel. When we embark on a journey, there is a tremendous enthusiasm and vitality in our bodies, but when the journey back home begins , all the organs give way to exhaustion, as it were! The mind also appears to be tired and all attention is singly focused on home. One just keeps waiting for the moment when he will finally be home.

Really speaking, the enthusiasm for onward journey should have been replicated during the return journey. After all, any region is as beautiful when we return homewards from it , as it had been on our way to it. But perhaps due to the anxiety of getting home or may be due to our attachment to it, although our eyes are open, our whole attention remains focused on home

and on the dear and near ones at home.

Each of us has stepped on to this earth... under the pretext of taking birth here ...to see and live on this earth to the fullest. How forcefully, how ambitiously and with what enthusiasm and excitement we live this life of ours....without the slightest thought that one day we have to end this journey and return home. And..suddenly, one day, we get an inkling of the return journey...there is the awareness that the homeward journey is shortly due. Our eyes are wide open, often the mind is also in control. The realization that the final journey has begun is clear. Yet, is there the same enthusiasm during this return journey as there had been during the long journey of life? Actually, such an enthusiasm should be there. Because that moment is equally rare. People should have the same excitement to enjoy that experience too. ..bearing in mind that a new return journey has begun. Only, in such a situation, will one be able to enjoy this journey also as a fun-filled jaunt. But unto how far away shall this journey be? Does it end at the point it is believed to conclude? Or does it begin all over again? Since we are not empowered with this perception, we become timid, nervous, and come to lose all the fun of the return journey. Such were the thoughts going on in my mind at this moment.

It was past one p.m. The October heat was unbearable. There was a kind of coolth in the breeze. But the dust of the journey made one feel tired..lackluster. No one was in a mood to say anything. We wanted to get to Margao, as soon as possible. Nanu (Madhavi) had been told that we would be there for lunch. She will worry, if we were late. She loves Ravindrabab exceedingly. ..not just as her maternal uncle... but as a writer..a litterateur...an intellectual...a thinker..!

Ravindrabab also loves Madhavi dearly. ..he looks upon her with affection not only because she has literary inclination and potential but also because she is the heir who shall look after

his literary legacy.

People like us have this one problem. ..of inheritance. Those who have earned a lot of material wealth do not need to be anxious about what will happen to their worldly riches. Every relative , close or distant, drawn to that wealth as a bee to honey, keeps an eye on that inheritance ... exercising their right as the legitimate inheritor of that wealth.

Although the wealthy also worry about who will inherit their property, anxious that it should fall into the hands of a deserving succçessor, that it should be properly utilized, and not be misused or wasted on exorbitant expenditure on luxury ...yet they have no idea of who will ultimately utilize it and how! However, they certainly know who will inherit it.

Ravindrabab did not earn much material wealth in his lifetime...so the question of who should inherit it does not arise. If at all there is some, it will go to either Girish or whosoever, he wills it to! Ravindrabab has no anxiety over this issue. What he is anxious about is who will inherit his wealth of books, his bookcases, his literature...!

Some persons donate such kind of wealth to a library or an institution of learning or research, if there is no suitable person to inherit it; so that it should be duly utilized by some of the deserving persons in society.

In Ravindrabab's case, this question does not arise. Not only is Madhavi his niece, she is a worthy recipient who values this literary wealth. In the circumstances, his attachment for her was natural. That may be why, Ravindrabab was keen to get back home, knowing well that she would worry over him.

I cast a glance at Ravindrabab. What is he thinking of? Of home? Of Godubai? Madhavi? Or of this region through which our car is moving?

He must be concerned about home, missing it. That is natural to any individual; it is his second-nature to feel so! But Ravindrabab has moved far ahead of this. He is worried more about the society, the country, the world ...but most of all about Konkani. That is why he does not call himself a 'writer'; he calls himself a 'fighter'.

Although I had bonded with him as a 'writer', I had been drawn more closely to the 'fighter' in him. His writing was not purely entertaining; it was the weapon of the fighter lurking inside him. A weapon that would provoke others to oppose anything that is evil, undesirable, anti-social; one that would directly attack anything harmful or anti-social.

Ravindrabab has dreamt of an ideal state, an ideal country, and an ideal world... To this day, he keeps nurturing such dreams.

I have found an ideal politician in him. I myself got involved into politics only because of him...considering it as a part and parcel of my work.

When I stepped on to the public domain, I had believed that politics is the job of the scoundrels...a task meant for thieves and cheats—not for the likes of me. In 1977, when I became active in the Konkani movement, the politics in Goa veered around the M.G. (Maharashtrawadi Gomantak), U.G. (United Goans) and Congress parties and Indira Gandhi's government was at the centre.

I had absolutely no inkling or opinion, as to which of these parties –M. G., U. G., or Congress should rule Goa, whether Indira Gandhi's rule at the centre was good or bad,...advantageous or not ! The little that I knew of Goan politics had been due to the politics of language. Dayanand Bandodkar was pro-merger. He had tried to merge Goa into Maharashtra. Even to this day (i.e. 1977), his party nurses

dreams of the kind, hence it is antagonistic to Goa, an enemy of Konkani, and so, my enemy too. This was my simplistic equation.

I had no interest in national politics. But since Ravindrabab says that Congress is bad, that Indira Gandhi is pushing the country into mire, I had turned against the Congress and Indira Gandhi.

My friends in Goa were in the Congress party. They were running the Youth Congress. They persisted that I too should join it. But the only argument that kept me away from the Congress party was : if Ravindrabab says a particular party is bad, how can I have contact with it? Had I joined Youth Congress in those days, today I would have become a M.L.A. or a minister.But I doubt whether, I would have remained 'Dilip Borkar'. I begin to believe the fact that it is only because of Ravindra Kelekar that I could be 'Dilip Borkar'.

Listening to my view that, I am not keen on politics, Ravindrabab would say that he is also not keen on it! But he would not forget to say, although we are not keen on politics, we have to be concerned with it. Then taking the example of a house, he would say, each of us needs a house to live in. We begin to construct it, but at the outset we think of the toilet. No body thinks of avoiding building a toilet for a house, because it carries waste and is unpleasant.

In our life too, we cannot stay away from politics, saying it is dirty. It is like the cleansing quarters of the house; it is essential. Just as we clean the toilet of the house, every day, so also politics has to be cleansed. Then it will not look dirty; but will become a part and parcel of the day to day business.

That was the period of opposition to Indira Gandhi. The Janata Party had begun to take roots in Goa. Ravindrabab was active in Janata party. Along with Madhav Beer, Kashinath Parab, Victoria Fernandes and others, he looked after the party affairs

in Goa.The leaders of the Jnanta party from Delhi, Mumbai would visit Goa. I would follow Ravindrabab diligently like a regular appendage. I was not yet old enough to get the membership of the Party. Yet I would be amongst them. Morarji Desai, George Fernandes, Raj Narayan and such other leaders would come to Goa and I would be there around them.

Then George Fernandes asked me to form the Yuva Janata Party, so that I should take up the responsibility of the youth wing . Along with Konkani movement, this was another activity that stuck on to me. Thus, I was covering political mileage as per my capacity under the guidance of Ravindrabab.

I began to write poetry, while moving ahead in this manner. But neither playing politics , nor composing poetry was enough to fill one's stomach. Hard cash was required to make a livelihood. I was paid a sum of rupees hundred and fifty or two hundred for running the office of Shenoi Goembab Birth Centenary Celebrations. That was only for one year. The celebration could not be extended. Even if it could have been, none would have done so merely to provide me that monthly sum.

The question of finding a job was troubling me. Had I a job, I could have continued my studies. Otherwise, I would have to take up the kind of work people like my my father did or I would have to become an employee at a shop or a store.

But having got in tandem with Ravindra Kelekar and other Konkaniwadis, it was not possible for me to think along these lines. Now the only thing to be done was to move on and ahead..!

After all, did Ravindra Kelekar have a job? Then why should I alone worry about finding a job. To add to this, Ravindrabab ould say, 'Everybody takes up a job. Are you also born to take up one?' It was a good advice but he would not tell me form where I should get the money necessary to survive.

And...one day Indira Gandhi declared a State of Emergency. The name of Jayprakash Narayan began to resound across the country. Ravindrabab was drawing me to the *'sampoorna kranti'* (the complete revolution) of JP. Indira Gandhi had unleashed a string of imprisonments, by taking the Janata Party leaders into custody. There was a possibility of many being imprisoned; some had already been put behind bars. That is why all of us would move secretly, wary of being put behind bars. Ravindrabab and other Janata Party leaders would meet secretly, hold meetings. I would go to the houses of Madhav Beer, Vasant Sabnis, and also to Margao to the residences of Kashinath Parab, Nuruddin Mavani, or Mohan Virginkar with the intimations of who should meet whom and at what venue .

In between, there was the task of collecting some funds for JP. Ravindrabab would strive along, his bag slung on , evading the police, determined to raise some amount at any rate for the JP fund. In Goa the M. G. party was in power. Had Congress been the ruling party and if the same party's government at the centre had declared Emergency, there would have been not much fear of arrest for Ravindrabab, since the Congresswalas were people with a pull towards Konkani. They could have taken care of him. But Goa was then a Union Territory and Shashikala Kakodkar's M. G. party was in power, and the party as well as its M.L.A.s were anti-Konkani. Moreover, they had a grudge against the Konkaniwadis. Mostly against Ravindra Kelekar.

M. G. party had got this opportunity on a platter of getting at the Konkaniwadis. So Ravindra Kelekar could be taken into custody any time. Every day when Ravindrabab left the house, he would go prepared to be arrested, carrying along with him his tooth-brush, tooth paste, a couple of books for reading.

'Dilip, now you must keep a little distance from me'. Ravindrabab said to me one day.

So far, I had no idea at all of what is a State of Emer-

gency, what would follow an arrest, what would be its consequences to me. Besides, being influenced to the core by Bhagat Singh, with the ideas of Naxalism and so on, I was assured that there was nothing wrong in getting involved in this campaign.

But Ravindrabab was firm in his thinking. He instructed me himself, that now I should not leave the office of the Shenoi Goembab Centenary Committee. If we should be taken in, then some of us should remain outside too. To try and get us out. 'Ours will be the first batch of those who get arrested. Yours shall be the second. If we are arrested, you should take up the leadership'. So saying, he sent me to the office of the Centenary Committee and secured me there.

Anyway, Ravindrabab was not arrested. But he was aware of Indira Gandhi's tactics. She knew how to finish off her opponents. Should anything amiss happen, he was worried that someone like me should not be victimized.

At that point in time, I had felt that Ravindrabab does not trust me. He is purposely trying to keep me at an arm's length. But Ravindrabab knew very well how far a person like me should be permitted to go, at what stage he should be stopped, and how care should be taken to ensure his well-being; and, he bore this in mind along with all other activities.

Then... the next big agitation was to overthrow Shashikala Kakodkar's government. We established the Peoples' Democratic Front. I was a part of its Committee. Our campaign of leading *morcha,* slogan-shouting against Shashikala, courting arrest and the like began. We would dwell on which minister or M.L.A. being taken away would cause the government to fall. The Congress M.L.A. s were with us. It was a long-drawn agitation. Shankar Laad, Dilkhush Desai among others were made to break away from the ruling party and Shashikala's government fell. I think at that point of time, Ravindrabab, myself and some others must have been in prison.

Ravindrabab intiated my revolutionary life in the movement... Once I had got into it, it was not possible to disengage from it and come out. I have come to this earth, become a part of this society, not to look after myself and my needs alone; this was the thought which Ravindrabab grafted on my mind thoroughly.

I decided the direction of my life. A job is not meant for me –was a thought firmly stuck on to my consciousness. I decided to try and do something great, something glorious; this life is for the society and so I decided that I will dedicate it fully to the service of this society only.

Ravindrabab had said that, education is essential but not merely to make one's career; but rather to obtain knowledge. Once a week I would visit him, sit by him and understand the philosophy of life. Lessons in what to read, what not to read, what to write, how to write were being imparted to me. Here, I also realized the significance of reading and was enunciated into the way of reading.

I had not got on to reading in English. Being a person who had studied in the Marathi medium, I knew hardly anything worthwhile in English. What reading I did was in Marathi and of the Marathi writers' work. But Ravindrabab was trying to extradite me from the grip of such writers. If I should continue to read them alone, there was the risk that my thinking would become stagnant. There is much literature in languages other than Marathi. If you cannot read a given language, you should read the translations of those works, but it is important to see who has done the translation work. There is a technique of good translation too. When a writer reads and absorbs another's work and then goes on to embellish it in his own language, such a rendering can be considered as translation.

English is a language that is important as far as literature is

concerned. There are many great writers in English. You should not give up on them, merely because you don't understand English. One should know English. Initially, you will be bored when you try to read a book in English. But you must sit with a dictionary at hand and look up the meaning of the word you find difficult. Only after you understand the complete meaning should you proceed reading further—such were his tips, about something or the other.

My reading in English began with such suggestions. It was as though Ravindrabab had inculcated the liking for English literature and authors not just in my mind but in my very blood stream.

Along with the reading of other literature, my reading and storing of knowledge from Ravindrabab's works continued. His *Saangaati* has been a very distinct book with a soothing message for me. This book has greatly helped me to cleanse the slate of the mind and etch new ideas on it.

It is not as if I have liked all the books of Ravindrabab. In order to enrich Konkani literature with various genres, he has also written some plays. Not exactly written, but rather having borrowed from other languages, has embellished them with Konkani language. The play *Lala-Bala,* the one-act plays like *Teen Eke Teen, Mukti* are adaptations only created to demonstrate that such dramatic works should be there (or that they exist) in Konkani; or to make plays available to those who wanted to stage them.

Tulashee, his novella is an outstanding example of regional writing. But just as the Konkani reader has not accepted Ravindrabab as a playwright or a novelist , I too have have not accepted him. These are the works meant for the *Preyas* (the likeable or the desirable), not of the *Shreyarthee* (one who pursues the desirable, the worthwhile, the creditable). I preferred Ravindra Kelekar as a thinker who provided the intellectual

manna.

His books such as *Samidha, Ghuspallen Zaanvem, Paanthasth, Othambe* among others, have been worthwhile guiding lights in my life. Such works alone have the capacity to build a new society.

The peak of all his literary oeuvre is his trans-creation of the *Mahabharata.* The two volumes of the *Mahabharata* published in 1987, are the greatest treasure of the Konkani language.

Most major languages of India, have the adaptations, or the translations of *Mahabharata*. It is to the credit of our language that only Konkani can boast of such a trans-creation. Ravindrabab spent close to six years of his life to create this *magnum opus* running into nearly eight to nine hundred pages. Only, Ravindrabab can do such literary penance. This is the task of a genuine creative writer, a true *Shreyarthee.*

The *Mahabharata* is a mine of priceless jewels. It is an encyclopaedia of Indian philosophy. A spiritual guide to Indian in genral. Teaching us about the path of righteousness—the *dharma* of life. Our earlier generations have had to explore this quarry of wealth through other languages, and perhaps due to this difficulty, they might not have been able to absorb it fully. But Ravindrabab has bestowed that good fortune on us.

Ravindrabab is himself content with this work. The main thing is being able to provide something of quality to Konkani; but also because this book was published at Delhi, at the hands of the then-Prime Minister, Shri Rajeev Gandhi.

Having a book published at the hands of the Prime Minister is not a big thing; not for Ravindra Kelekar at least. But that period during which the book was published was the most deci-

sive in her history for Konkani.

Konkani had been recognized as an independent language by the Sahitya Akademi. Much literary creativity was going on in Konkani. But the devotees of Konkani were not happy with just that much. Konkani was yet to obtain to her status of authority. It was on the path to becoming the State language; and with that her path towards the inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution would be clear.

Shri Rajeev Gandhi had been dwelling on the idea of having some of the languages of India included in the Eighth Schedule. There was the need to place the question of Konkani's inclusion too, before him. With demonstrations, agitations etc. the issue had assumed significance and the demand strengthened. But with all this, the importance of this question, its significance to the language, the people and the State had to be stated in the presence of Rajeev Gandhi.

On the occasion of the publication, the book was released at the hands of Shri Rajeev Gandhi. During that function in a short speech of five minutes, the task of communicating the question of Konkani to Shri Gandhi and touching the chord of his very heart was accomplished by Ravindrabab with his nascent, inimitable skill. This incident is as important as the trans-creation of the *Mahabharata* into Konkani.

On the pretext of the book release, Rajeev Gandhi could understand the issue pertaining to Konkani. As a result, Konkani was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution winning her rightful place in the comity of other Indian sister-languages. In the history of Konkani, this 'Mahabharata' has as much significance as the trans-creation of the *Mahabharata.* In the other *Mahabharata,* Krishna had played a significant role; in this Mahabharata, that role was performed by Ravindrabab..!

We had crossed over into Goa, and were moving towards Margao. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. All along the way none of us said a word. Tobu and Girish were engrossed in their own world.

Nanu had been waiting for us. We too had been tired of eating the Udipi food for two long days. I was eager to eat rice with fish-curry. Nanu immediately served us food. I had thought that she would say, 'you must be tired after the journey. Quickly have a bath.' But she directly said, ' Tato, first you'll have food, won't you?' and Ravindrabab promptly agreed, 'Of course, Nanu. Look, how late it is! And I'm so famished.' With this he had a quick wash. That meant the question of bath did not arise for me too. I was also very much hungry.

While we were having food, only Nanu and Ravindrabab were talking. Ravindrabab, who had kept mum all along the journey home, was talking to Madhavi. She is really very fortunate to have an uncle like Ravindrabab!

Madhavi had prepared a tasty meal with dishes of fish. I think, Raju's mother, her mother-in-law, must have prepared it. The moment Ravindrabab reached Madhavi's house, he was no longer Ravindrabab. He turned to 'Tato' and became exclusively hers. At this moment, it was necessary to leave him to be Nanu's Tato. So I gently extracted myself from Ravindrabab.

Lunch over, we had to leave for Priol. Godubai must be waiting for Ravindrabab. Nevertheless, Madhavi forced us to have tea before we left. Ravindrabab did not refuse the offer.

After tea, we set out for Priol. I had to get there too. Not to accompany Ravindrabab home... My car had been parked there. At five, we touched Priol. Godubai was waiting at the door. It was as though a path had emerged from her eyes, and Ravindrabab was walking along that way...towards her.

' Ravindra, you're back!' She exclaimed happily.

Handing over her Ravindra back to her, I got into my own car...with a new resolution... of *Shreyarthee*...!

This book is the outcome of Dilip Borkar's affection and adoration for Ravindra Kelekar the man and the thinker, and Kiran Budkuley's sense of pride on Ravindrabab's string of achievements for Konkani and Goa-culminating in the awards of the Padma Bhushan to him and then the Gnyanpeeth… a first for Konkani…!

The author as well as the translator consider it a privilege to be able to contribute to the Ravindra Kelekar canon each a distinct way.

As such, Shreyarthee is as much a memento commemorating the major events and achievements of Ravindrabab's life as it is a quest into the man and his work. Simultaneously, it is an inquest into his thought process even while it is a loving tribute to one of the living legends of Konkani, of Goa and of Indian Literature!